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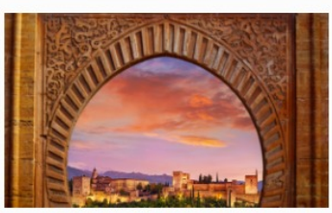

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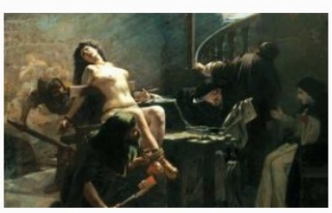

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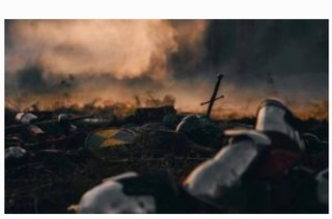

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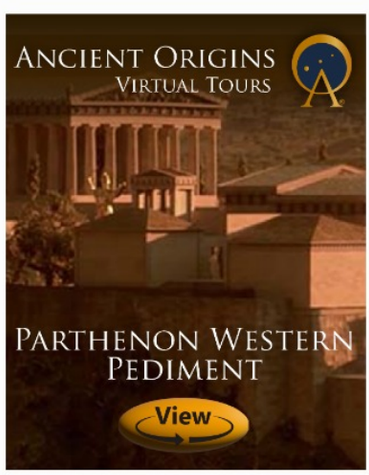

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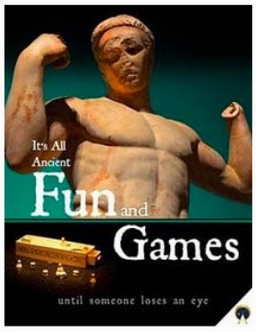

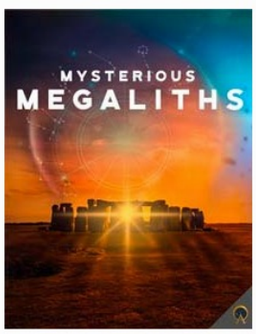

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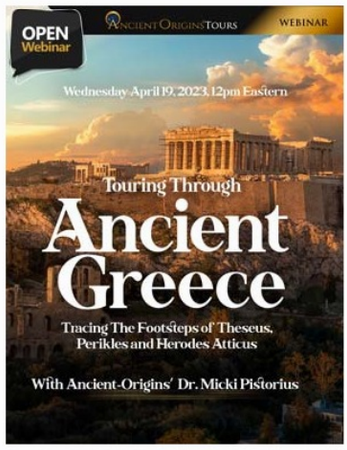

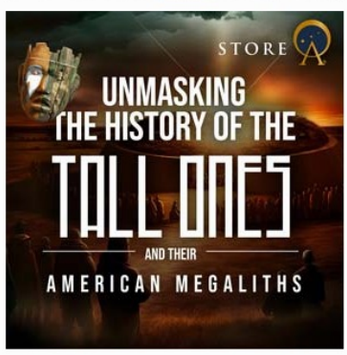

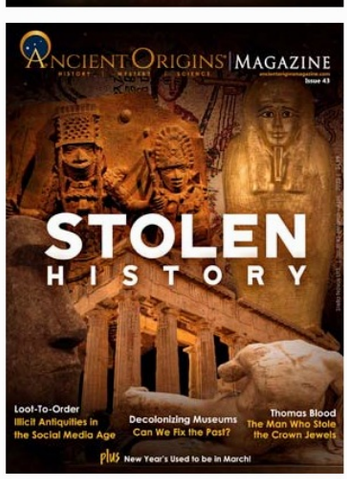

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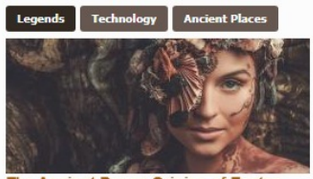

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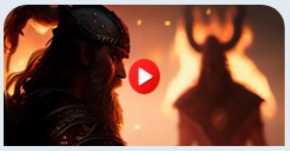

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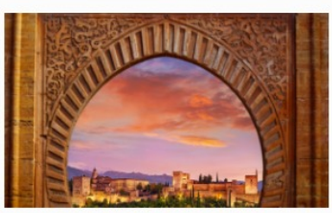

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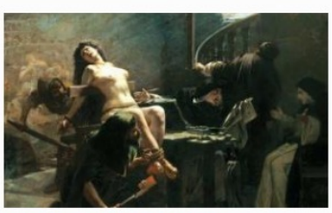

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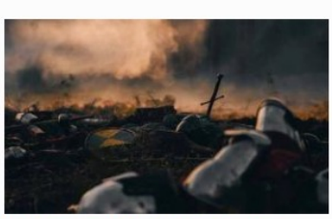

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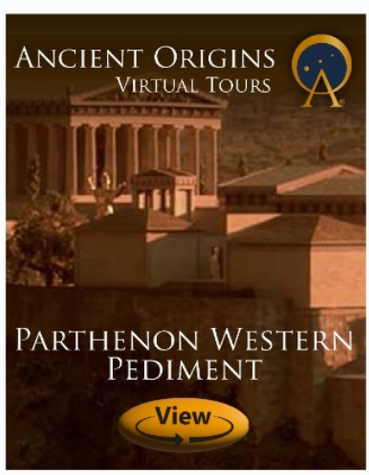

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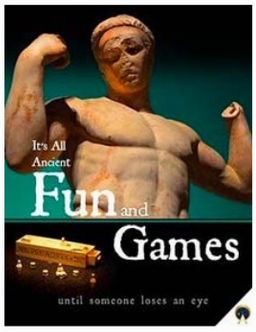

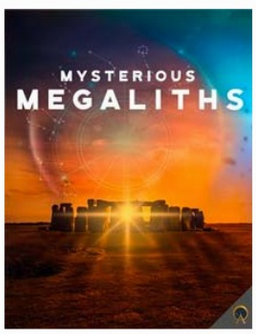

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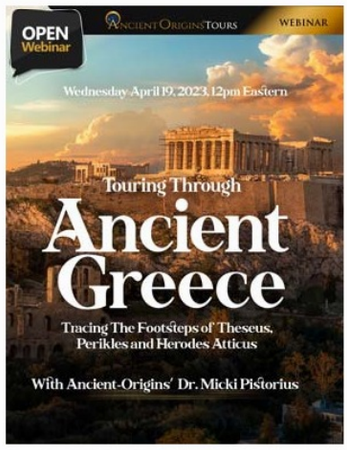

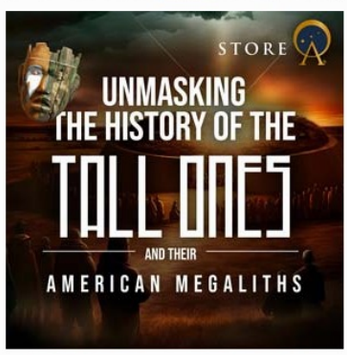

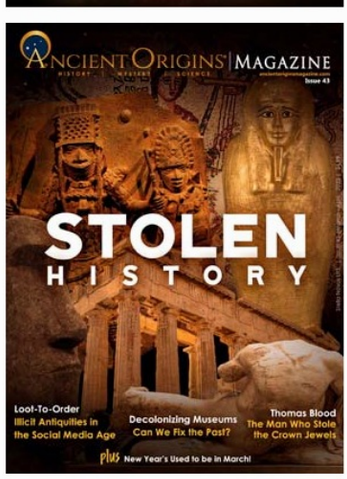

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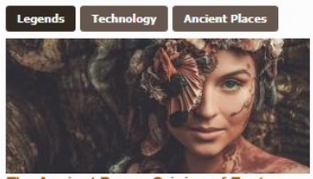

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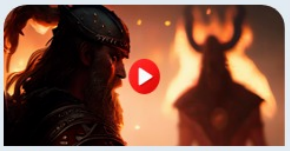

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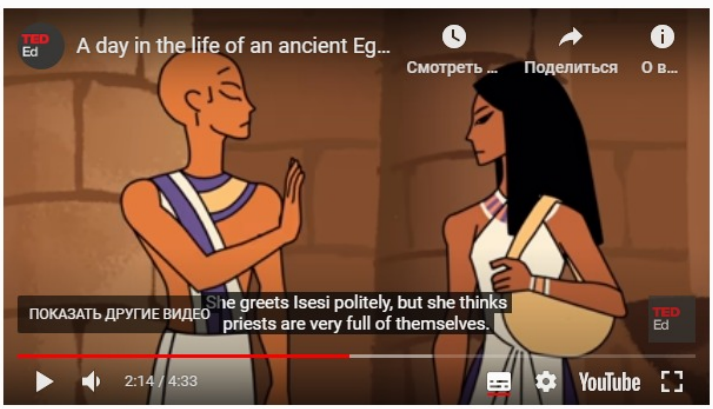
Let's take a closer look at a typical day in the life of an Egyptian doctor, examining their training, methods, and tools. We'll explore how they diagnosed and treated a wide range of **illnesses** using both **science and religion** .

By delving into the world of ancient **Egyptian medicine** , we can gain a new appreciation for the ingenuity and innovation of this ancient civilization, as well as the incredible dedication and skill of the doctors who served their people.



*Top image: An invocation to I-em-hetep, the Egyptian deity of medicine (**Wellcome Collection** / CC by SA 4.0)*

By **Robbie Mitchell**

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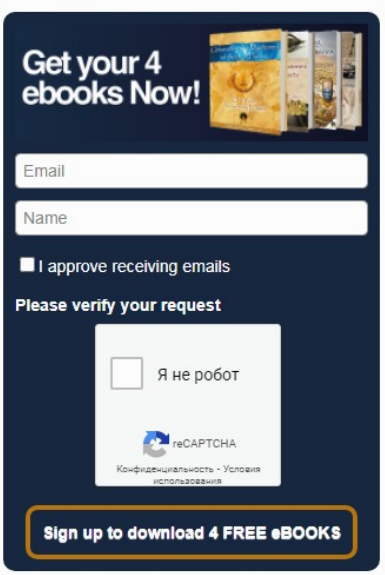

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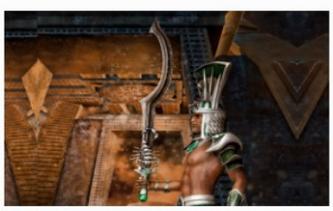

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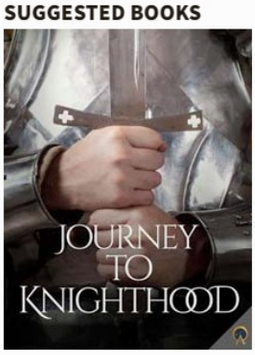

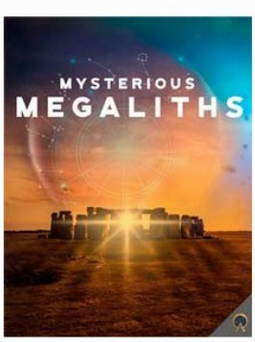

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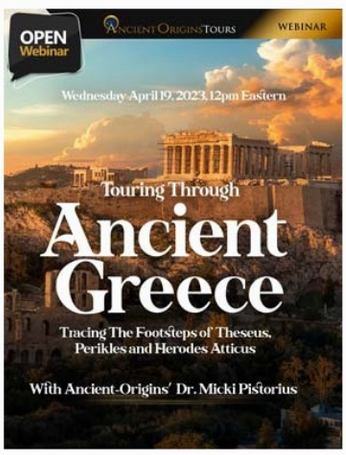

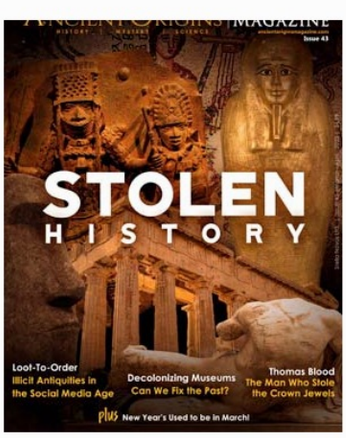

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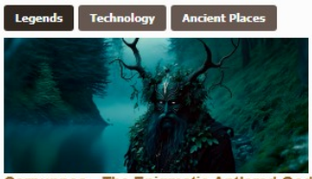

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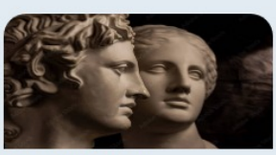

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UPDATED 3 MAY, 2017 - 19:13 MARK OLIVER

4 Completely Different Versions of the Story of Moses

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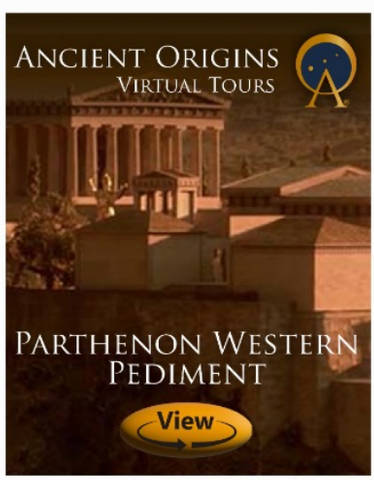
The story of Moses doesn't just show up in the Bible. In the ancient world, nearly every culture had their own version of what happened. The Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans all had their own way of explaining why thousands of people left Egypt to live in Jerusalem.

The Moses you know, who performed miracles and freed the Jewish slaves from Egypt, is just one version of the story. There are others – and they paint a completely different picture from the one you've heard.



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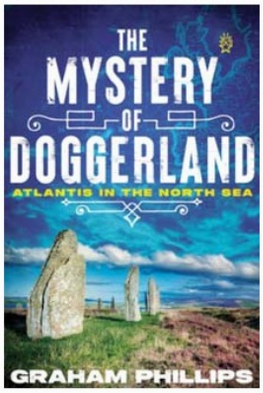
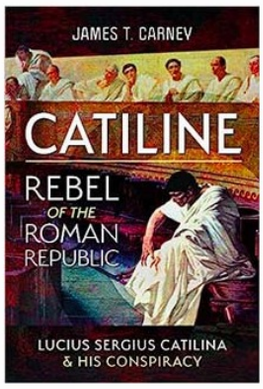
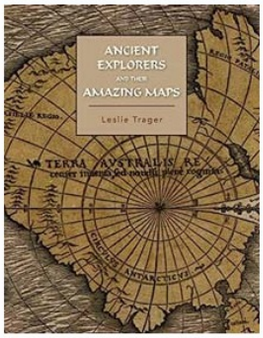






*Detail; Moses and the tablets of law. Source: **Public Domain***

Manetho: Moses, Leper King and War Criminal

The Egyptians told the story of Moses, too, but in their version, he wasn't a miracle-working hero with god-given powers. In the version passed down by the Egyptian historian Manetho, Moses is a brutal and violent monster – and he isn't even Jewish.

Moses, according to Manetho, was an Egyptian priest named Osarsiph who tried to take over Egypt. The pharaoh had quarantined everyone with leprosy into a city called Avaris, and Osarsiph used them to stage a revolt. He made himself the ruler of the lepers, changed his named to Moses, and turned them against the pharaoh.

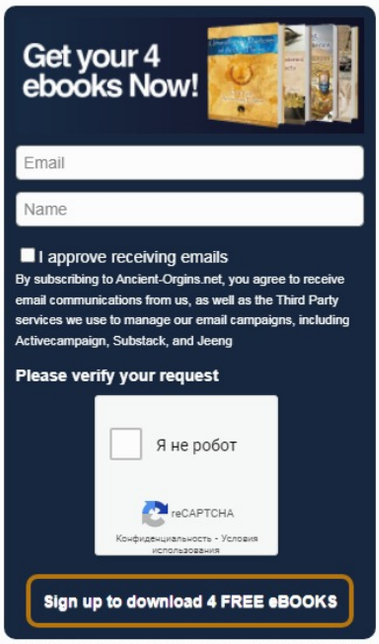
- Questioning the Moses Timeline: Clues revealed in work of murdered playwright Marlowe
- Moses: Myth, Fiction or History?
- The Exodus - Intervention from the Gods

*Moses lifts up the brass serpent, curing the Israelites from poisonous snake bites in a painting by Benjamin West. (**Public Domain**)*

Moses and his army of lepers created the Jewish laws purely out of spite for the Egyptians. They deliberately made their laws the exact of opposite of everything the Egyptians believed. They sacrificed bulls, for example, purely because the Egyptians worshiped one.

Moses and his leper colony formed an alliance with the people living in Jerusalem. He built up an army of 200,000 people, then invaded Egypt. They conquered Ethiopia first, where they reigned as brutal despots. According to the Egyptians, Moses and his people " **abstained from no sort of wickedness nor barbarity** ."

The ancient Egyptians worshiped sacred animals like Apis, who was a living bull treated as a god. Moses didn't just kill these sacred animals – he forced the Egyptian priests who served them to do it for him. The priests were forced to burn their divine animals alive on top of a pyre made of sacred images. Then they were stripped naked and sent out into the wilderness to die.



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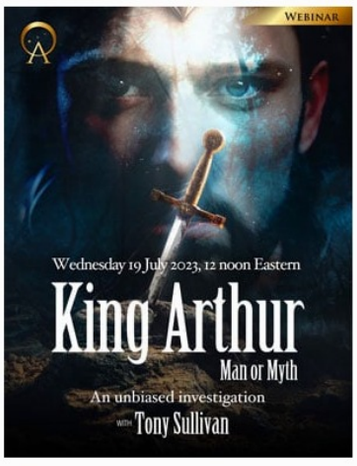

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Eventually – after about 13 years – Amenophis managed to get a big enough army together to chase Moses out of Egypt. He chased him into Syria, where Moses and his people settled in Jerusalem. According to the Egyptians, though, every Jewish law that makes the foundation of our modern society started in that leper colony as nothing more than spite against Egypt.

*Moses with the Ten Commandments (1648) by Philippe de Champaigne . (**Public Domain**)*

Strabo: Moses, Philosopher

According to the Greek historian Strabo, Moses wasn't a miracle worker and he didn't speak to God. He was just a philosopher who sat down, thought about it, and decided that monotheism made the most sense.

Moses, at the time, was the ruler of Lower Egypt, but he was "dissatisfied with the established institutions" in his own country. God, he believed, could not be a man or an animal, but had to be "one thing which encompasses us all".

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*God Appears to Moses in Burning Bush. Painting from Saint Isaac's Cathedral, Saint Petersburg. (1848) By Eugène Pluchart. (**Public Domain**)*

He was so convinced of this that he gave up his position and led a group of people out of Egypt to start their own country. These people weren't slaves, and this wasn't a revolution. They were, according to Strabo, "right-minded people" who agreed with Moses's philosophy, and **nobody tried to stop them** from leaving.

Moses and his people made it to Jerusalem, which they did not have to conquer. It was, according to Strabo, "surrounded by a barren and water territory", so nobody else really wanted it. There, he set up a lax religion with few rules, which was so popular that the surrounding nations willingly joined his kingdom.

After Moses's death, though, Jerusalem was taken over by "superstitious persons" who introduced the kosher diet and circumcision – ideas that, Strabo claims, went completely against everything Moses taught.

*The Death of Moses, as in Deuteronomy 34:1-12, illustration from a Bible card published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company. (**Public Domain**)*

Atrapanus: Moses, Egyptian War Hero and Cult Leader

Even the Jews had more than one version of the story of Moses. The Jewish historian Atrapanus had his own version of the story, and even though he was Jewish, it's completely different from the story in Exodus.

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The Book of Exodus: ' The Israelites Leaving Egypt' by David Roberts, c. 1829 (***Public Domain*** *)*

Moses, according to Atrapanus, was raised as the son of Chenephres, king of Upper of Egypt. Chenephres thought Moses was his own son – but, apparently, the bond between a father and a son wasn't enough to keep Chenephres from trying to kill him.

Chenephres sent Moses to lead his worst soldiers into an unwinnable war against Ethiopia, hoping Moses would die in battle. Moses, however, managed to conquer Ethiopia. He became a war hero across Egypt. He also declared the ibis as the sacred animal of the city – starting, in the process, the first of three religions he would found by the end of the story.

*'Victory O Lord!' By John Everett Millais . (**Public Domain**) Hur and Aaron hold up the arms of Moses during the battle with the Amalekites*

He started his second religion when he made it back to Memphis, where he taught people how to use oxen in agriculture and, in the process, **started the cult of Apis** . He didn't get to enjoy his new cult for long. His father started outright hiring people to assassinate him, and he had no choice but to leave Egypt.

While in exile, he started his third religion after God burst out of the earth and told him to invade Egypt. Moses obeyed and, in the process, freed the Jews – but in this version of the story, he was much more efficient. He just whispered the name of god into the pharaoh's ears and the pharaoh became "speechless and as one dead".

*Moses before the Pharaoh, a 6th-century miniature from the Syriac Bible of Paris. (**Public Domain**)*

Tacitus: Moses, The Exiled Atheist

When the Roman Tacitus tackled the story of Moses, he was determined to get it right. By the time he was alive, there were already a lot of different stories about him floating around. He did his best to sort out the parts that made sense to him.

"Most authorities," Tacitus wrote, "agree on the following." Like Manetho, his story begins with Egypt being plagued by leprosy, which he says was spread through pork. Instead of going to war, however, Moses and the other lepers were just expelled from the country altogether and sent out into the wilderness.

In the wilderness, Moses ordered his people to **turn against god and man** , telling them that "both had deserted them". Instead, he taught them, they should only trust their own judgment. He led them through the desert, keeping them alive by bursting water out of the ground – but this wasn't a miracle. Instead, Moses found underground channels of water by following patches of grass.

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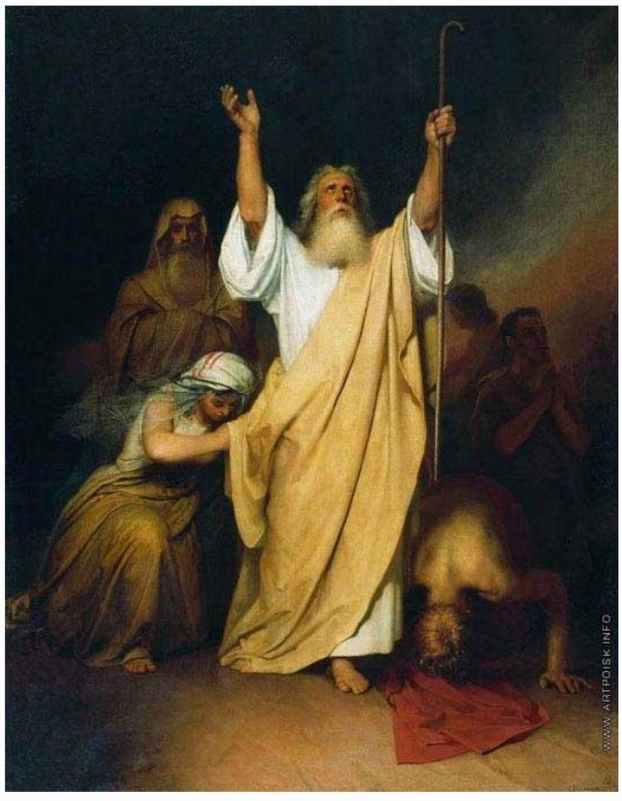
*Moses Striking the Rock . (**Public Domain**)*

Once they made it to Canaan, Moses introduced a new religion – not because he believed in it, according to Tacitus, but because he believe d it would "secure the allegiance of his people".

He introduced the kosher diet because eating pork had given them leprosy. He introduced fasting as a way to commemorate their journey through the wilderness. He had them keep the seventh day holy to commemorate their journey through the desert – which, in this version, didn't take forty years. It took seven days.



*Moses and the Israelites. (**Public Domain**)*

Through Tacitus, though, we get a beautiful little glimpse into how history is created. It's easy to see the parts he's taken from the Egyptian story, the parts he's taken from the Jewish story, and he's filtered it all through his own worldview.

But it's just another view – not the truth. Whoever the real Moses was, today we can only see him split through the prism of history – the truth broken up into little refractions of the truth, each one colored by the culture that tells it.

*Top Image: Moses' Horns. Source: rethought/ **CC BY NC 2.0***

By **Mark Oliver**

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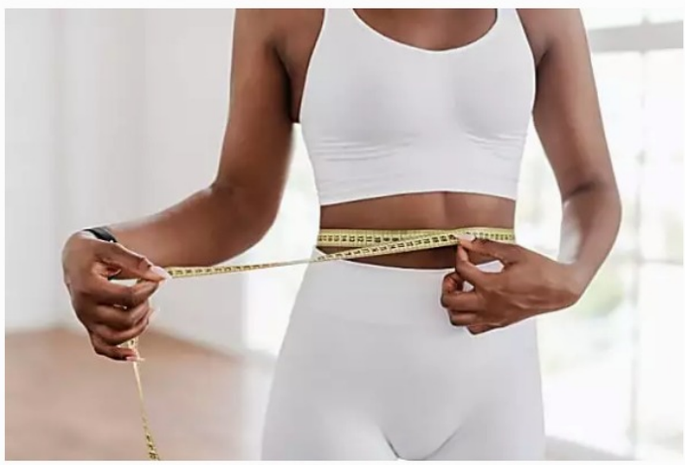

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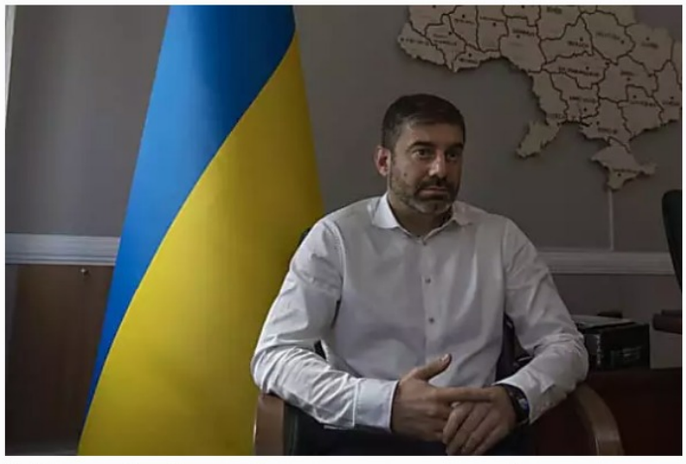

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Five Female Monarchs of the Muslim World

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The death of British Queen Elizabeth II earlier this year provoked retrospectives on her reign, as well as reflection on the rule of other female monarchs. Many powerful women leaders of the West are well-known, but there have also been numerous Muslim queens and sultanas, who ruled over powerful kingdoms.

1)Sultana Taj ul-Alam (ruled 1641-75)

Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah was born in 1612, the daughter of Iskandar Muda, king of **Aceh** (present-day Indonesia), and his royal wife, Putri Sani. Her father's rule was known as the 'golden age' of Aceh, but he was a despot, ruling through military might rather than diplomacy. At the time of his death, he had no legitimate male heirs, having killed his own son just months before his own demise. Therefore, he nominated and placed his son-in-law, Iskandar Thani on the throne.

This move by Iskandar Muda disregarded the Orang Kaya, a league of nobles that helped run the kingdom. The name of the group of elites translates to 'rich people'; as such, they played a very crucial role in the royal succession. As Sher Banu A.L. Khan wrote:

> *"The chronicles show that the elites played an important role in appointing and demanding rulers: weak rulers—those who possessed unacceptable personality traits injurious to the kingdom—were removed. This means that the nobility's consent and acceptance of a candidate was a vital condition for a ruler's succession."*

Iskandar Thani was an ostentatious and extravagant ruler. His reign saw the depletion of the royal treasury, as the king was ordering extravagant jewelry from the **Dutch**. After just five years in power, he died mysteriously, leading many historians to conclude that he had been murdered. His death led to a crisis because there were no legitimate male heirs with a proper royal background. When a few among the Orang Kaya nominated themselves to be king, their fellow Orang Kaya didn't want to see one of their own on the throne, so attention turned to Safiatuddin, the daughter of Iskander Muda and widow of Iskandar Thani. Hossein Kamaly wrote in his book, *A History of Islam in 21 Women* :

> *“When it comes to succession, the Sultanate had no hard-and-fast rules. A suitable candidate had to be a native of Aceh and of royal birth and had to demonstrate commitment to the principles of justice, as defined in Islamic terms and understood in Malay tradition or custom (adat).”*

Since there was no need for the monarch to be male, within three days of Iskandar Thani’s death, Safiatuddin ascended the throne with the approval of the Orang Kaya and the *ulama* (Muslim scholars of Islamic law) at the age of 29. She inherited a throne in trouble because the **Dutch East India Company** was slowly establishing power in neighboring territories. Despite numerous political clashes with the Dutch, where they were trying to gain a monopoly on the tin and pepper trade, Aceh held its own against the pressure and even retained their **vassal states** .

Sultana Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah successfully ruled Aceh for thirty-five years, paving the way for future queens. Dutch scholars have written that during the queen's rule, it felt like Aceh had always been ruled by a female monarch. After her death in 1675, three successive queens took her place.

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Painting of the Sultana Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah, who ruled the Sultanate of Aceh for thirty-five years. (Hanataturi / ***CC BY SA 4.0*** *)*

2)Sultana Shajar al-Durr (ruled 1249-1257)

Shajar al-Durr was the first and only woman to sit on the Egyptian throne after **Pharoah Cleopatra VII** , who had reigned thousands of years earlier. Shajar al-Durr was born a slave, but after her marriage to Malik al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, the eighth sovereign of the Ayyubid dynasty, Shajar rose to the rank of queen consort. However, she was thrust into a position of power when the **Seventh Crusade** , led by King Louis IX, invaded Egypt.

Her husband, Malik al-Salih, died in the middle of the conflict, and Shajar had to hide her husband's death to keep the soldiers' spirits up. She issued orders under her husband's name and won a decisive victory, even capturing the French king. Her intelligence and worth were recognized by the nobles, who chose to place her on the throne when Malik al-Salih's son failed to be a good leader. Her first act was to negotiate an enormous ransom for King Louis IX of France.

Unfortunately, Egypt was under the control of the **Caliphate** of Baghdad, and the Caliph al-Musta'sim violently opposed the accession of a woman to the Egyptian throne. While Shajar al-Durr didn't demand any grand titles, she did ask for

simple recognition of her talents and capability as the Egyptian head of state. In response to her accession, the caliph sent a simple message that was intended to humiliate. As Fatima Mernissi wrote in her book, " *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*" :

> *"The Caliph then sent to the Egyptian emirs the famous message, so humiliating to her, in which he proclaimed that he was ready to provide them with some capable men, if no more existed in Egypt, since they were reduced to choosing a woman."*

Despite the caliph's rejection, Shajar al-Durr adopted the title *Malikat al-Muslimin* , which means "Queen of the Muslims." However, just 80 days into her reign, immense pressure from external forces led to Shajar agreeing to a second marriage, with Izz al-Din Ayubek. A condition for the marriage was that Ayubek had to divorce his first wife, which he did.

Shajar al-Durr may have held the reigns of the kingdom, but her new husband didn't like being sidelined and planned to marry a foreign princess to increase his control. When Shajar found out, sources claim that she may have orchestrated his assassination. In the end, Ayubek's son, Mansur, took control with the aid of the Mamaleek, Egyptian nobles.

Shajar al-Durr was handed over to Mansur's mother, the previous wife of Ayubek, who exacted terrible revenge on the former queen.

> *"Shajar al-Durr, the former Sultana was beaten to death by wooden shoes, then her body was dragged by the feet to the top of the citadel and then thrown to her death from the top. Shajar's body was torn apart by dogs before they took pity and buried her remains within the mausoleum, she had constructed herself."*

Despite her short reign, she achieved a great military victory, commissioned grand monuments, and tried to make Egypt a grand empire. Unfortunately, she was surrounded by men who felt threatened by her power and authority, and that is why she met such a gruesome fate.

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Mausoleum of Shajar al-Durr in al-Khalifa neighborhood, Cairo (R Prazares / ***CC BY SA 4.0*** *)*

3)Sultana Khadija (ruled 1347-79)

Sultana Khadija of the **Maldives** is another example of a female monarch with a long, successful reign. In 1347, after a vicious power struggle, Sultana Khadija, daughter of Sultan Salah al-Din Salih, ascended the Maldives throne and ruled for 33 years. It was during her reign that the famous explorer **Ibn Battuta** traveled to the Maldives and recorded important information regarding Khadija's enthronement:

> *"The only survivors from the ruling house were his three sisters…The inhabitants of the Maldive islands preferred for sovereign Khadija and she was the wife of their orator (khatib) Jamal-ud-din who became vezir."*

Orders were issued in the name of the sultana and a *khutbah,* a religious address including recognition of the sovereign, was even proclaimed in her name. This was something that had never been done for any other female queen, as the *khutbah* was thought to have been reserved for a male ruler. Sultana Khadija was a wise ruler and reigned over her kingdom with the help of her husband. She died in 1379 and was replaced by her younger sister, Myriam.

4)Sultan Regent Terken Khatun (ruled 1072-1094)

Terken Khatun was the second wife and chief consort of the Sultan of the **Seljuk Empire** , Malik Shah I. She was a Qarakhanid princess and the daughter of Tamghach Khan Ibrahim, a great king of his era. To secure her position further, she gave birth to the heir of the empire, Mahmud I.

Her life changed when her husband was assassinated in 1092. Fearing for her son's life, and because he was still a minor, Terkun took power in his name. Her first act as regent was to secure her rule. Her toughest challenge came from the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadi (coincidentally also her son-in-law), who was opposed to having a woman as ruler and thus would not allow the *khutbah* to be proclaimed in her name.

Despite the opposition, she was able to improve the political situation in her country, trying to pave the way for her son. Unfortunately, she died suddenly during a conflict, tragically followed a month later by her son.

*Malik-Shah I seated on his throne, circa 1315. His death placed Terken Khatun on the throne as regent, although her reign as a female monarch was quite short. (**Public Domain**)*

5)Queen Arwa al-Sulayhi (ruled 1065-1138)

Arwa Bint Ahmad al-Sulayhiyya was the queen of **Yemen** and held power for almost half a century. She is said to have enjoyed the privilege and unquestioned position of head of state. Like Sultana Khadija, Arwa had a *khutbah* proclaimed in her name.

Arwa suffered the loss of her parents at a young age and was raised in the court of her paternal uncle, Ali al-Sulayhi, and his queen, Asma Bint Shihab al-Sulayhiyya. It was in this environment that Arwa was raised by her strong-willed aunt, who ruled as an equal with her husband. One difference between Arwa and her aunt Asma was that Asma ruled without a veil, attending meetings with her face uncovered; however, Arwa chose to remain veiled. Impressed by Arwa's intelligence, at age 17, Ali and Asma married her to their son, al-Mukarram. After the death of Asma, Arwa assumed control with her husband, al-Mukarram, who granted her the same respect and freedom that had been granted to his mother.

Fatima Mernissi wrote in her book, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* :

> *"The historians emphasize that 'Arwa gave her full attention to military conquests, needing to prove that the dynasty was still as strong as ever despite the loss of its great leader Ali and the disability of al-Mukarram. In politics, unlike in music, being a woman does not soften behavior."*

Another 19th century historian, Yasin al-Khatib al-Amri, described Arwa as a sovereign who "perfectly understood how to manage the affairs of state and of war."

Queen Arwa al-Sulayhi was a successful female monarch, leaving behind beautiful architectural monuments like the famous Sana'a mosque. She set up cultural and religious centers, making sure that the teachers and scholars were paid well. Queen Arwa was an intellectually gifted and efficient queen, as well as a matchless administrator.

Queen Arwa's Mosque, as seen from the Palace of Queen Arwa (Mufaddalqn / ***CC BY SA 3.0*** *)*

Conclusions about Female Monarchs

The circumstances surrounding the ascension of these female monarchs were each unique, but there is no denying that once they were seated on the throne, they carried out their duties with vigor and responsibility. They protected their people from invaders, kept their economies thriving, and helped influence the cultural and spiritual renaissance of their respective kingdoms. They deserve to be remembered for their extraordinary talents and bravery that kept their people safe and their empires prospering.

Top Image: Female monarchs have been rare, but not unheard of, across the world. Like their male counterparts, they had mixed track records. Source: **FrankBoston** */ Adobe Stock*

By Khadija Tauseef

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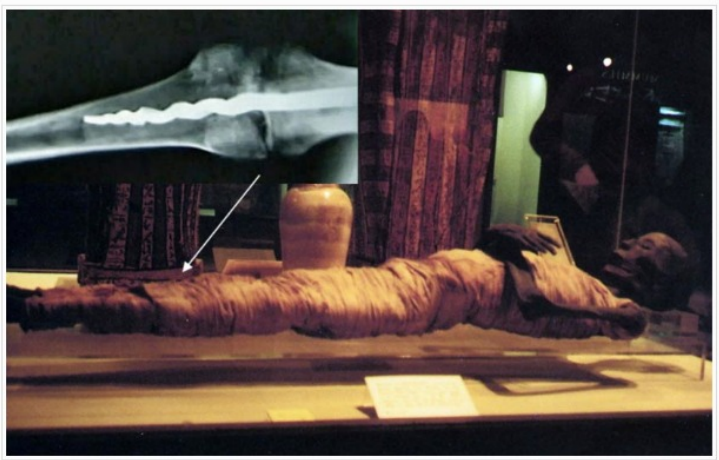

UPDATED 20 JULY, 2015 - 14:35 APRILHOLLOWAY

Medical Mystery of Usermontu: Why the Discovery of 2,600-Year-Old Knee Screw Left Experts Dumbfounded

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In 1971, the Rosicrucian Museum in California acquired a sealed ancient Egyptian coffin containing the well-preserved mummy of a high status Egyptian male. More than two decades later, a team of scientists made a shocking discovery – the mummy displayed evidence of an advanced surgical procedure carried out nearly 2,600 years ago. Inside the mummy's left knee was a 9-inch metal orthopaedic pin that had been inserted with such advanced biomechanical principles, that initially scientists could not distinguish it from a modern-day procedure.

Usermontu – a mummy of unknown origins

When the Rosicrucian Museum acquired a sealed ancient Egyptian coffin back in the 1970s, they were unaware that it still contained a mummy. In addition, investigations revealed that this mummy was not the original owner of the sarcophagus – it belonged to a priest named Usermontu ('the power of Montu') – and that long after death, the mummy had been placed in Usermontu's coffin. Nevertheless, the mummy of unknown origin has come to be known by the name of the original sarcophagus owner.

Analysis of the embalming procedure revealed that 'Usermontu' was an upper-class Egyptian male who lived during the New Kingdom of Egypt (between 16th–11th century BC). His mummified remains are 5ft (1.5m) tall and display traces of red hair.

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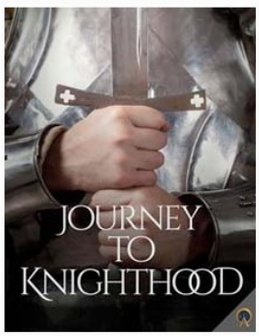

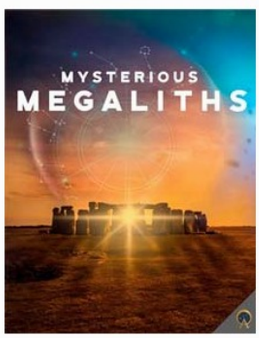

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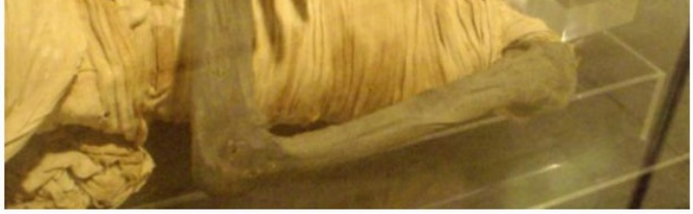


*The mummified remains of 'Usermontu'. (**Wikimedia Commons**)*

Shocking discovery

In August 1995, Professor C. Wilfred Griggs from Brigham Young University, Utah, and a team of experts, carried out x-rays on six mummies housed in the Rosicrucian San Jose Museum in advanced of a lecture he would be giving there, including the mummy of Usermontu. They were stunned when the x-rays revealed that one of the mummies had a 9-inch metal pin in its left knee.

Ancient or modern?

Brigham Young University (BYU) reports that it was impossible to see that the metal implant was ancient from the x-ray alone, leading Professor Griggs to believe that the pin had been placed there in more modern times to reattach the leg to the rest of the body.

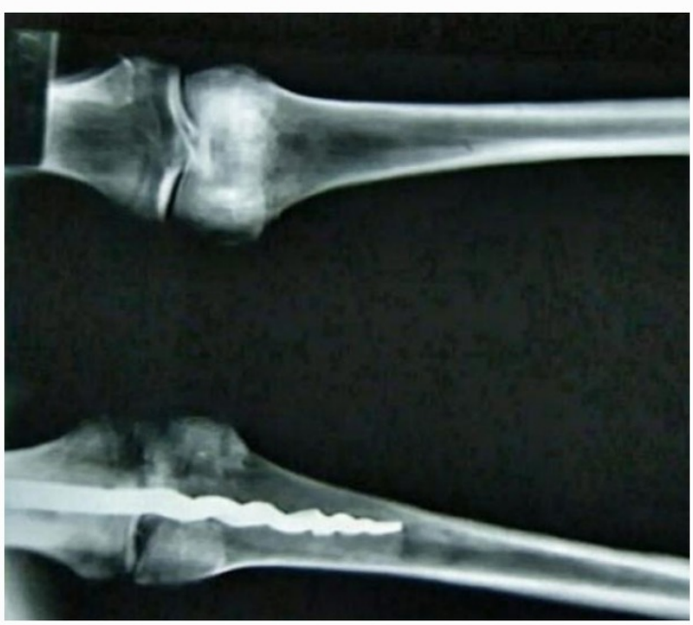
"I assumed at the time that the pin was modern. I thought we might be able to determine how the pin had been inserted into the leg, and perhaps even guess how recently it had been implanted into the bones," Griggs says in a report released by BYU. "I just thought it would be an interesting footnote to say, 'Somebody got an ancient mummy and put a modern pin in it to hold the leg together.'"

A team of experts, including (from left) BYU professor C. Wilfred Griggs, Utah county medical doctors Bruce Mcliff and Richard Jackson, and San Jose, Calif., doctor Grady Jeeter, examines the mummy in which Griggs discovered a 9-inch iron knee pin. Courtesy of Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Unraveling the mystery

In order to investigate the nature of the implant, Griggs, Dr. Richard T. Jackson, an orthopaedic surgeon from Provo, and Dr. E. Bruce Mcliff, chief of radiology for Utah Valley Regional Medical Center, carefully drilled into the bone to allow access for a tiny camera to examine the pin, and to extract samples of the bone and the metal.

The scientific team found traces of ancient organic resin, similar to modern bone cement, as well as traces of ancient fats and textiles still held firmly in place. Extensive investigations revealed that the advanced procedure had been carried out in ancient times, approximately 2,600 years ago.



X-ray showing the 9-inch drill in the knee of Usermontu. Credit: Brigham Young University

Advanced orthopaedic procedure

The research team were astounded that the pin had been created with the same designs used today to create bone stabilization.

"We are amazed at the ability to create a pin with biomechanical principles that we still use today —rigid fixation of the bone, for example," said Dr. Richard Jackson. "It is beyond anything we anticipated for that time."

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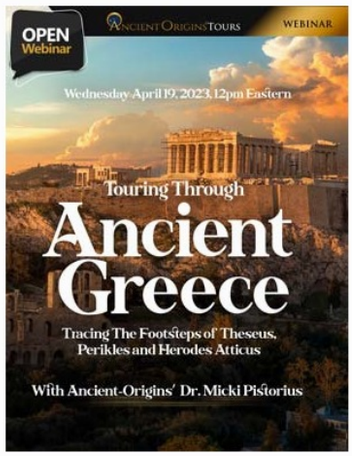

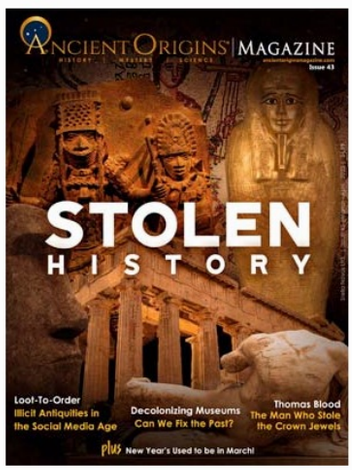

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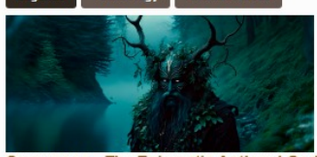

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ByU reports that the pin "tapers into a corkscrew as it enters the femur, or thigh bone, similar to biomechanical methods currently used. The other end of the pin, which is positioned in the tibia, or shin bone, has three flanges extending outward from the core of the pin that prevent rotation of the pin inside the bone."

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Before or after death?

Following the remarkable discovery, the question left on everyone's lips was – had the surgery been carried out while Usermontu was alive, or after his death?

A full-scaled investigation of the exposed joint revealed that the pin had been implanted between the time of Usermontu's death and his burial. The ancient Egyptians believed in a physical resurrection after death, in which the body was a vehicle for the soul in the afterlife. Thus, ensuring its integrity was of utmost importance. Griggs added that making sure the body was in a good condition was believed to be essential for the reunification of body and spirit.

While this is the first case of a metal orthopaedic implant, other examples of bodily care prior to mummification included the repair of wounds, work to teeth, and the construction of prosthetics.

A 3000-year-old prosthetic big toe, which had been placed on a deceased body after death. Housed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Credit: The University of Manchester

"How fascinating that the technician took such considerable thought constructing the pin," Griggs says. "The technician could have just simply wired the leg together and assumed that in the resurrection it would knit back together."

"The story tells us how sophisticated ancient people really were," Griggs says. "Sometimes our cultural arrogance gets in the way of our being able to appreciate how people from other cultures and times were able to also think and act in quite amazing ways.

Source: Snow, K. 'BYU Professor finds evidence of advanced surgery in ancient mummy'. ***Brigham Young University*** *.*

Featured image: The mummified remains of Usermontu, Rosicrucian San Jose Museum (Wikimedia Commons). Inset: Metal pin found in the knee of Usermontu. Credit: Professor Griggs, Brigham Young University.

By **April Holloway**

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APRIL

April Holloway is a Co-Owner, Editor and Writer of Ancient Origins. For privacy reasons, she has previously written on Ancient Origins under the pen name April Holloway, but is now choosing to use her real name, ***Joanna Gillan****.*

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Greek Mythology

As Greek mythology goes, the universe was once a big soup of nothingness. Then, two things happened: either Chaos or Gaia created the universe as we know it, or Ouranos and Tethys gave birth to the first beings.

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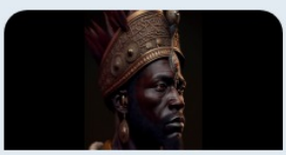

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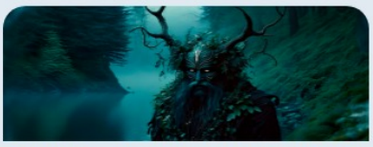

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Romeo and Juliet: Not a Shakespearean Tale After All

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William Shakespeare's world renowned *Romeo and Juliet* (written sometime between 1591 and 1595) stands in the historical record as one of the greatest love stories ever written. It has been retold many times in playhouses and theaters and has a wealth of film adaptations of both traditional and modern interpretations. It is most interesting to discover then, that *Romeo and Juliet* was not, in fact, truly of his own creation, but rather a variation on **a story told many times** from the 1400s onwards.

Centered on the theme of **star-crossed lovers** , borrowed from poets as far back as ancient Greece, Romeo and Juliet's tale was told at least a century before Shakespeare actually wrote it. This article intends to take a brief look at these particular tales, which eventually culminated in the Bard's celebrated play.

A Summary of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust provides this excellent short summary of the Bard's famous play *Romeo and Juliet* :

> *"An age-old vendetta between two powerful families erupts into bloodshed. A group of masked Montagues risk further conflict by gatecrashing a Capulet party. A young lovesick Romeo Montague falls instantly in love with Juliet Capulet, who is due to marry her father's choice […] Paris. With the help of Juliet's nurse, the women arrange for the couple to marry the next day, but Romeo's attempt to halt a street fight leads to the death of Juliet's own cousin, Tybalt, for which Romeo is banished. In a desperate attempt to be reunited with Romeo, Juliet follows the Friar's plot and fakes her own death. The message fails to reach Romeo, and believing Juliet dead, he takes his life in her tomb. Juliet wakes to find Romeo's corpse beside her and kills herself. The grieving family agree to end their feud."*

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It is an enthralling and tragic tale, but Shakespeare didn't come up with the plot for his play alone. Actually, it's based on several older stories and some of them have very similar elements.

Early Versions of the 'Romeo and Juliet' Plot

The first certain tale of the woes of Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet descends from Italian author Masuccio Salernitano (1410-1475). Published a year after his death, Salernitano's 33rd chapter of his *Il Novellino* tells of Mariotto and Giannoza, a pair of lovers who come from the **feuding families** of Maganelli and Saraceni respectively. In this account, their love affair takes place in Siena, Italy rather than in Verona and is believed to have occurred contemporary with Salernitano's time.

Much like Shakespeare's version, Mariotto and Giannoza fall in love and marry secretly with the aid of an Augustine friar. Shortly thereafter, Mariotto has words with another noble citizen—in this case, not his love's cousin—and kills the nobleman, resulting in his fleeing the city to avoid capital punishment. Giannoza, distraught, is comforted only by the fact that Mariotto has family in **Alexandria, Egypt** and makes a good home for himself there.

However, her own father—unaware of her wedding—decides it is time for her to take a husband, putting her in a terrible position. With the aid of the friar who had wed her and Mariotto, Giannoza drinks a **sleeping potion** to make her appear dead, so she can be smuggled out of Siena to reunite with her husband in Alexandria. Of course this plan goes

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terribly awry, and her letter to explain their plan to Mariotto never reaches him, though news of her death quickly does.

While she flees to Alexandria to finally reunite with him, Mariotto returns to Siena – risking his own life to see her corpse one final time. It is then that he is captured and taken to be executed for his previous crimes, beheaded three days before Giannoza's own return to the city. Giannoza then, heartbroken, wastes away of a broken heart, supposedly to be finally reunited with her beloved husband in heaven.

*Like Shakespeare's account of Romeo finding Juliet sleeping but believing her dead, Salernitano's earlier story contains a scene in which Mariotto finds the sleeping body of Giannoza, and believes she has died. (**Public Domain**)*

As one can see, there are many similar elements between Shakespeare's tale and Salernitano's. The themes of feuding families, the forbidden love, the sleeping potion, and the terrible communication mishap all lead to the parallel ending of mutual death of the star-crossed lovers. Writing only a hundred years apart, Shakespeare could well have come across Salernitano's work, or one of the many other variations that were written before the story reached the Bard's desk.

Luigi da Porta in the 1530s wrote a similar compilation, telling the tale of Romeo Montechhi and Giulietta Cappelleti, moving the setting of their lives from Siena to the Verona – the same place where Shakespeare would locate it. The pair again wed in secret with the aid of a friar, only to be torn apart by Romeo's accidental killing of Giulietta's cousin and their subsequent deaths—Romeo by Giulietta's sleeping potion, and Giulietta by holding her breath so she could die with him.

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Romeo and Juliet are wedded by a friar, just as Romeo and Giulietta in Luigi da Porta's work. (***Public Domain*** *)*

Shakespeare's Biggest Inspirations for *Romeo and Juliet*

Following da Porta came Matteo Bandello (1480-1562), a monk and an author who took da Porta and Salernitano's tales even further. He was the Italian author who is most directly credited as having **influenced Shakespeare** , as Bandello introduces many of the specific themes that make Shakespeare's play so well known today. Bandello's version, while in many ways comparable to Salernitano's text, provided the well-known last names of Montague and Capulet to the two titular characters.

Bandello also added the element of the costume ball, at which Romeo and Juliet meet, and also the pertinent moment in which Juliet viciously kills herself with her lover's dagger so that she may join Romeo in the afterlife, rather than merely wasting away as Giannoza did. Bandello's tale is widely believed to have been closely followed by the French author Pierre Boaistuau, whose version was then translated into English by Arthur Brooke as a poem called *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* in 1562. This English translation was the actual text that made it to Shakespeare's desk.

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Romeo and Juliet meet at a costume ball, just as the young lovers meet in Bandello's story. (***Public Domain*** *)*

Is *Romeo and Juliet* Based on a Real Story?

Many Shakespearean scholars, well informed of these previous literary treasures, also have collected evidence that the Bard might have drawn the characters of Romeo and Juliet from his own life. A patron of Shakespeare's, Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton,

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is thought to have inspired Shakespeare's Romeo in character, further implicated because his stepmother descended from the Viscount Montagu.

Henry Wriothesley also had an unapproved relationship with the woman Elizabeth Vernon, as when news of their marriage reached the ears of **Queen Elizabeth I** , the queen put them both in jail as their union was a political threat to her reign. Unlike the real Romeo and Juliet —in every story—the Earl and Vernon were later able to live "happily ever after" outside the prison walls, yet this undesirable political union is highly considered to have also influenced the Bard's writings.

*Henry Wriothesley (**Public Domain**) and Elizabeth Vernon (**Public Domain**) – were they the real Romeo and Juliet?*

Transforming Romantic Literature

Despite the numerous versions of Romeo and Juliet's story that preceded William Shakespeare, it cannot be denied that it was his work that transformed their love affair into **one of the greatest stories ever known** . The Bard might have borrowed heavily from Salernitano, Bandello, and Brooke, but the audience which his play was presented to took the text into their hearts and spread it throughout Elizabethan England until the titular characters' names became interchangeable with the mantra "meant to be".

Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet's undying affection and subsequent suicides have made the passionate story immortal, and it remains one of the foremost inspirations for modern **romantic literature** .

*Top Image: Detail of 'Romeo and Juliet' (1884) by Frank Dicksee. Source: **Public Domain***

By **Ryan Stone**

Updated on June 11, 2020.

References

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RILEY

Riley Winters is a Pre-PhD art historical, archaeological, and philological researcher who holds a degree in Classical Studies and Art History, and a Medieval and Renaissance Studies minor from Christopher Newport University. She is also a graduate of Celtic and Viking... **Read More**

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Abyssinia and the Ethiopian Empire: The Ancient History of a Struggling Nation

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The Horn of Africa is a region with a unique identity and vibrant history. Close to the Arabian Peninsula, it always stood out from the rest of the African continent. Today, the Horn of Africa is home to the modern nations of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia, comprising some 115 million people. Throughout centuries of rich history, Ethiopia has managed to persevere and preserve its identity, despite many pressures. Once known as the Ethiopian Empire, or Abyssinia, which existed from 1270 to 1974, it is one of the longest surviving empires in history and is defined by its distinctive character and a past filled with defining moments. Today we'll be stepping back in time, as we recount the ancient and modern ages of the venerable Ethiopian Empire.

Ancient Origins of the Ethiopian Empire: The Rise of Aksum

The earliest origins of the Ethiopian Empire reach back before 1270. The story begins with the **Kingdom of Aksum** , also known as the **Aksumite Empire** , an ancient kingdom of great import in the classical world. Aksum was located in today's northern **Ethiopia**, and flourished from about 80 BC to 825 AD. Taking its name from its key city, the capital called Axum, its strategic location played a crucial role in the trading routes of the ancient world, particularly between ancient India and the Roman Empire. In time, Axum grew in power and importance, and eclipsed the neighboring and older Kingdom of Kush.

The importance of Axum was well portrayed by the famous Persian prophet Mani, who said:

> *"There are four great Kingdoms on Earth: the first is the Kingdom of Babylon and Persia; the second is the Kingdom of Rome; the third is the Kingdom of the Aksumites; the fourth is the Kingdom of the Chinese ."*

To the Greeks and the **Romans**, the Kingdom of Aksum was well known, as it was to the Arabs and the Persians as well. Aksum ascended to great heights thanks almost exclusively to trade. Commerce was the key factor that helped Axum evolve to become the capital of an empire. This can safely be ascribed to its proximity to the Red Sea and its trade routes, since all it had to do was successfully facilitate the growing need of the Greeks and the Romans for African goods. A

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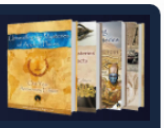

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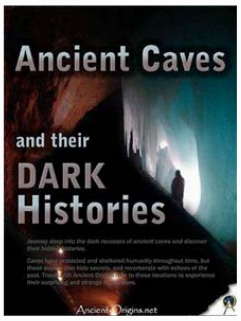

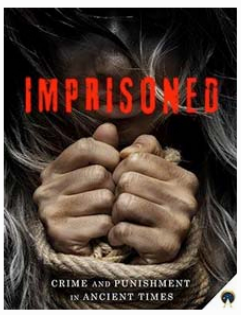

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major export of Axum was elephant ivory, which was a highly sought after commodity in the Mediterranean, Levant, and Persia.

Aksumite traders established far-reaching caravans that would travel into the African interior in order to procure more ivory. As Axum was located at key crossroads for trade traffic, it only sped up its prosperity. In time, Axum became the hotbed for a rising civilization with a unique character fed by a proper amalgam of indigenous African cultures infused with South Arabian character, as well as plenty of influences from the classical world of the Mediterranean.

*The Book of Aksum is a collection of 15 th century documents from St. Mary's Cathedral of Aksum which gives crucial information about Ethiopian history. (**Dmitry Chulov** / Adobe Stock)*

A Crucial Trading Power Rises

The name Ethiopia to describe the Aksumite Empire appears as early as the 4 th century, and one popular explanation for the name is that it comes from Greek: Αἰθιοπία (Aithiopia). This is a compound word that roughly translated means "burnt face" or "red brown". This term was used early on by Herodotus to denote this particular region of Africa. This Greek word was later loaned to the Amharic language of the region as ʾĪtyōṗṗyā.

More precisely, the name *Aethiopia* was used in Greco-Roman inscriptions for a long time and denoted specifically the region of ancient Nubia. However, in the 15 th century Ethiopian church book, known as the *Book of Aksum* , it is stated that the name stems from a legendary biblical figure known as Ityopp'is, a son of Cush (Kush). It was Ityopp'is who allegedly founded the city of Axum. Ethiopia was also known as Abyssinia in English historiography and elsewhere. This term stems from the Ethiopian Ge'ez language and their pronunciation of Aethiopia: *Habashat*.

The people of the Aksumite Empire began using the designation "Ethiopians" only around the 4 th century AD, when the Aksumite King Ezana conquered Nubia. Around this time the Aksumites also came in contact with **Christianity**. This occurred with the arrival of the two brothers and Christian Missionaries, Frumentius and Edesius, who managed to enter the royal Aksumite court and convert it to Christianity. Ethiopia (Aksum) was thus the second country to officially adopt **Christianity** in world history. The first one was Armenia in 301 AD.

Aksum began to enter a gradual decline in the 6 th and 7 th century AD, due to religious rivalry, Jewish persecution of the Christians and the rise of Islam. Around this time the use of the name Ethiopia becomes prevalent.

*Ethiopia was one of the earliest nations to adopt Christianity. Lalibela is one of Ethiopia's holiest cities and a center of pilgrimage. These rock-cut monolithic churches are dated back to somewhere between the 7 th and 12 th century AD and were declared a world heritage site in 1978. (**yurybirukov** / Adobe Stock)*

Struggling Between Religions: The End of the Aksumite Empire

One of the first acts in the empire's fall came in 520 when King Kaleb led a campaign against the Jewish Himyaritic King Dhu Nuwas who was persecuting Christians in **Yemen**. Although the Axumite forces won the conflict and secured Christianity in Yemen (at least until the advent of Islam), the years of battle over-extended Axum's wealth and manpower. Its position as an economic and trading power was diminished, but it still remained active to an extent. As the first major Islamic power, the Rashidun Caliphate rose to prominence and conquered Egypt and the Red Sea around 646 AD. Aksum became economically isolated, but even so it remained firmly

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Christian.

Oral history holds the Aksumite Empire was eventually defeated by the Hebrew **Queen Yodit** (also known as Gudit or Judith), around the early 900's AD. This defeat brought the end to the centuries old Aksumite Kingdom and all its rich history. During her 40 year reign of Aksum, Yodit conducted numerous pogroms against the Christian populace, burning churches, crucifying people, and forcefully converting the citizens, all as part of her campaign to terminate Christianity in an apparent act of revenge.

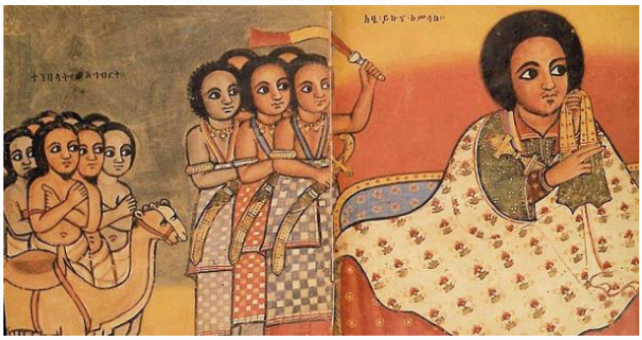
During this period, a great deal of Axumite heritage is said to have been destroyed. Yodit's reign ended around 960, when she and her successors were overthrown by an Agaw Lord called Mara Takla Haymanot. The Agaws were a Cushitic ethnic group of the region. This lord married the female descendant of the last Aksumite monarchs, and thus established a new lineage known as the Zagwe Dynasty . This new dynasty ruled over a smaller region than Aksum, and remained Christian, although still largely isolated.

*The Adal Sultanate invaded the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) Empire in what came to be known as the Abyssinian-Adal War which lasted from 1529 to 1543. (**Public domain**)*

The successful Zagwe Dynasty was eventually overthrown around 1270 AD. This happened with the emergence of a rebellious Lord named Yekuno Amlak, who claimed he descended from the Aksumite Kings of old, and ultimately, from **Solomon**. Most likely due to the political circumstances of the time, Amlak succeeded in receiving substantial aid from the Sultanate of Shewa, a small Muslim Kingdom that established itself in Ethiopia and competed with the Zagwe. This was one of the rare times that an alliance between Muslims and Christians occurred. Yekuno Amlak succeeded in establishing the Ethiopian Empire and becoming the head of the ruling Solomonic Dynasty, which remained in power until 1974. Not long after, relations with the neighboring competing Muslim sultanates deteriorated, and conflicts occurred sporadically for centuries afterwards.

One of the completing sultanates that managed to stay in power was the Ifat Sultanate. In the early 14 th century AD, the famed Ethiopian Emperor Amda Seyon I invaded Ifat and defeated it. But the descendants of Ifat managed to return to the region at a later date to establish a new and more powerful regional entity, known as the Adal Sultanate, a Muslim Somali Kingdom. This power would prove to become a huge threat for the rising Ethiopian Empire.

The Adal Sultanate invaded the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) Empire around the year 1529, led by the Somali Imam and General Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi. This came to be known as the Abyssinian-Adal War, which lasted from 1529 to 1543. The very first conflict occurred almost at once, in 1529, when the invading Adal forces met a sizeable Ethiopian army in open battle. Both sides suffered immense casualties, but the upper hand went to the forces of Imam Ahmad. Even so, he decided not to pursue further, and the invasion was in a passive state for about two years.



*After defeating the last Zagwe king, Yekuno Amlack established the Ethiopian Empire and became the head of the ruling Solomonic Dynasty which remained in power until 1974. (**Public domain**)*

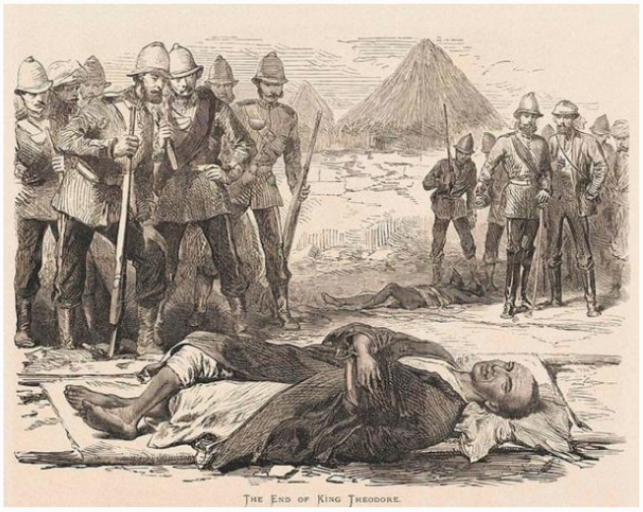
The Return of the Solomonic Dynasty

The next string of victories for the Adal forces came around 1531. The first occurred in the Battle of Antukyah, followed by the Battle of Amba Sel soon after. Both resulted in decisive Muslim victories. The Adal forces relied heavily on early firearms and cannons, which worked with great effect against the Ethiopian forces, oftentimes instilling great fear in the common soldier. Eventually, the forces of Imam Ahmad penetrated deep into the Ethiopian highlands, and conducted heavy sacking of the empire. The latter was eventually occupied and annexed by the Adal Sultanate, which united the territories with those of modern-day Somalia. This occupation of

Ethiopia lasted for 14 years.

Around 1543, the guerilla warriors of Ethiopia received aid from the Portuguese Empire, whose navy provided crucial military support. At the time, the Portuguese were involved in the Ottoman-Portuguese conflicts which lasted from 1538 to 1559. Since the Adal Sultanate received aid from the Ottomans, the Ethiopians aided by the Portuguese. With the Portuguese help, the Adal forces were gradually defeated, culminating with a decisive Battle of Wayna Daga that caused the collapse of Adal forces and the death of Imam Ahmed.

A new challenge for the Ethiopian Empire occurred in the 16 th and 17 th centuries, with the increasing migrations of the Oromo peoples of southern **Ethiopia**. This Cushitic ethnic group progressively migrated north and eventually became involved with the imperial politics. A direct consequence of these migrations was a loosened grip of the empire on its faraway provinces as the latter gained more independence than usual. It was not until the reign of the Emperor Iyasu I the Great of the **Solomonic dynasty** , who reigned from 1682 to 1706, that the things were once more consolidated and returned to prosperity. His successor, Iyasu II, took this power one step further and allowed the Ethiopian Empire to flourish.



*Emperor Tewodros II committed a grave error, by imprisoning several British representatives in 1868, which led to serious reprisals from the British and his subsequent suicide. (**Public domain**)*

Vying for Power and Facing the Modern Age

Where there is power and wealth, there is also crisis. For **Ethiopia**, this crisis era emerged around 1769 and lasted until 1855. It is known as the *Zemene Mesafint* , or the "Era of Princes". During this period the empire was largely divided and decentralized, with numerous regional *ras* (dukes or lords) competing for influence and power over the emperor. This unstable period was only brought to end with the rise to power of the famed Emperor Tewodros II. The charismatic ruler once more stabilized the Empire of Ethiopia and became a favorite of the people.

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Later in his rule though, Tewodros committed a grave error. Seeking to force the British to give him military aid, the Emperor imprisoned several British representatives in 1868, an event that caused a serious reprisal from the British. This response from **Queen Victoria** became known as the Punitive Expedition to Abyssinia, which resulted in the burning of the Fortress of Magdala and the subsequent suicide of Emperor Tewodros II. As the result of this British involvement, the throne of the Empire passed on to Yohannes IV, an Ethiopian noble who claimed connection to the Solomonian Dynasty. His rule marked the rise of the modern era of **Ethiopia** and is defined by his victory over the Ottoman Egypt.

The cover of Time Magazine, from November 3, 1930, features Haile Selassie I, the last emperor of Ethiopia.

The Last Emperor of an Ancient Lineage

The Ethiopian Empire managed to survive for many centuries, in fact well into the 20 th century, making it one of the last surviving empires of the world. Its last emperor was **Haile Selassie I** , a member of the Solomonic Dynasty and one of the defining figures of modern Ethiopian history who could trace his lineage to the 10 th century BC. His series of political and social reforms greatly modernized the country. Alas, the last emperor was deposed in 1974 by the pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist military dictatorship known as the *Derg* (Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia) which ended the monarchy, murdered Haile Selassie, and brought communism to Ethiopia.

The Aksumite Empire, and the subsequent Ethiopian Empire, are not often a burning historical subject – and unjustly so. The ancient, far-reaching, and endlessly important history of these powerful entities are filled with thrilling and world-defining events, many of which are connected with some of the most powerful empires of the ancient times. The stubborn and inspiring fight for survival of a Christian nation surrounded by Islam is unique on the African continent, and the endurance of the centuries-old Solomonic dynasty into the 1970's is nothing short of thrilling for any history enthusiast.

Top image: The Ethiopian Empire, or Abussinia, which existed from 1270 to 1974, it is one of the longest surviving empires in history and is defined by its distinctive character and a past filled with defining moments. Source: ***Vladimir Melnick*** */ Adobe Stock*

By **Aleksa Vučković**

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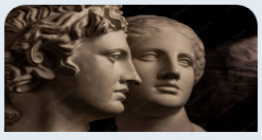

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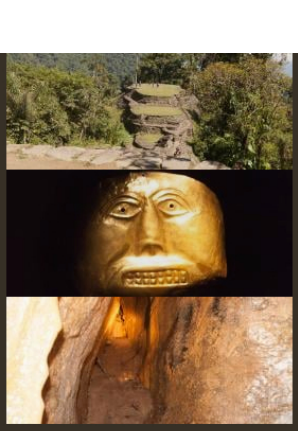

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Sijilmasa: The Golden Oasis and Africa's El Dorado

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Throughout ancient African history, gold has played a fundamental role, particularly as a source of wealth and power. Meanwhile, the cities that thrived on the gold trading routes were motivated by the lure of this precious metal and enjoyed great prosperity and prestige. Sijilmasa was one such city; perched on the northern edge of the Sahara Desert, it occupied a strategic position on the so-called "golden route." However, despite its early success, the city was marked by power struggles, turbulence, and eventual decline. In this piece, we delve into the history of this jewel of the desert oasis.

Jewel of the Oasis: Exploring the History of Sijilmasa

The ancient city of Sijilmasa has been described by many historians as the "African El Dorado." Despite being reduced to ruins, Sijilmasa remains a site of great importance, and is protected as an endangered archaeological site. Located in the desert landscape of modern-day Morocco, the crumbling walls of Sijilmasa serve as a testament to its lost grandeur and the passage of centuries.

Built on the northern edge of the Sahara Desert, Sijilmasa stands in the midst of the lush Tafilalt Oasis, near the banks of River Ziz. Its strategic location enabled it to emerge as the regional entrepôt, a crucial trading city on the African gold route. As a result, it became one of the most valuable cities in the region, as traders carrying precious gold and other goods were required to pass through Sijilmasa on their journey either towards the sea or inland.

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Naturally, Sijilmasa's strategic location meant that it was destined for greatness. Many legends about the city quickly emerged, similar to the tales of the original "El Dorado," or the City of Gold. Sijilmasa was founded around 757 AD by Sufri Khajiri Muslims refugees. Its rise to prominence was exceptionally swift. "Around Sijilmasa there are deposits of gold and silver," observed the Arab writer Ibn Yakubi less than a century after its founding. "The gold is found like plants, and it is said that wind blows it away."

Of course, Ibn Yakubi embellished his tales just a little bit, but there is no doubt that Sijilmasa was a true "city of gold." For one, its mints struck pure **gold coins** as early as the 10th century AD. In fact, archaeological evidence suggests that **gold** was transferred through this area as early as the 4th century AD. From the bountiful goldfields of Bambouk, Bouré and Lobi in south-central Africa, trading **caravans** *had* to pass northwards, and through Sijilmasa.

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*Representational image of a trading caravan travelling through the desert. (**Justinas** / Adobe Stock)*

The Puzzle of Sijilmasa: Investigating the City's Mysterious Origins

As we mentioned, Sijilmasa is officially said to have been founded by Sufri Khajiri Muslims, who fled in the wake of the Berber rebellion against the **Umayyad** Caliphate around 740 AD. There are, however, other legends related to the founding of Sijilmasa, some of which are more difficult to believe.

The famed historian and writer from Iberia, al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Zayyati - better known as Leo Africanus, wrote in the 16th century AD that the city was founded by a Roman General - Suetonius Paulinus. To commemorate his victories in the area, he founded the city and named it *Sigillum Masse* as a symbol of victory, which over time morphed into Sijilmassa. However, the conspicuous absence of **Roman** archaeological artifacts indicates that this is highly unlikely.

Whatever the true origins of the town may be, radar scans and archeology confirm that there was some pre-urban activity on the site much earlier than the actual emergence of the city itself. This is quite likely, since Sijilmasa is situated at a favorable spot - a naturally fortified location that lies along the fertile banks of the River Ziz within the flourishing Tafilalt Oasis. Thus, the site had all the prerequisites for the emergence of a thriving settlement.

Much of what we know about Sijilmasa and its early history comes from the famed Arab traveler and writer, Al Bakri. In his work, *Book of Routes and Places,* Al Bakri explained that the first leader of the settlers in Sijilmasa was one Isa bin Mazid al-Aswad. He was chosen as the leader, and ruled in Sijilmasa for 14 years, before being executed on accusations of corruption. In his place came Abu al-Qasim al-Miknasi, whose descendants would form the Midrar Dynasty that would rule from Sijilmasa until 977 AD.

*Sijilmasa has been remembered as a beautiful ancient oasis city. (**Public domain**)*

Prospering from the African Gold Routes

The next we hear of Sijilmasa comes from another Arab traveler, Ibn Hawqal, who visited the area around 950 AD. In his writings, Ibn Hawqal noted that the city was quickly growing in economic power, due to shifting trade routes in Africa. As a result, the flourishing oasis city attracted the attention of trading caravans.

Previously, trade between Egypt and the gold-producing **Ghana Empire** was conducted by crossing the harsh deserts, but this soon became untenable. The trade caravans shifted their paths, so as to travel through the Maghreb area and to Sijilmasa in the **oasis**. From there, they could again head south through the Sahara, with better results and less harsh conditions.

Visiting the booming town of Sijilmasa, Ibn Hawqal was stunned by its prosperity and the overall wealth of the gold-route cities. He witnessed a bill issued to a trader from the Mauritanian city of Aoudaghost, from a trader from Sijilmasa. The bill, written out for 42,000 dinars, was an astounding sum for the time. Ibn Hawqal had never witnessed such an amount in his entire life of travel.

The city's wealth was undoubted: **gold** from **Sudan** was minted here, and the volume of trade with the regional realms was stunning. Of course, all that wealth and prosperity brought with it a degree of independence.

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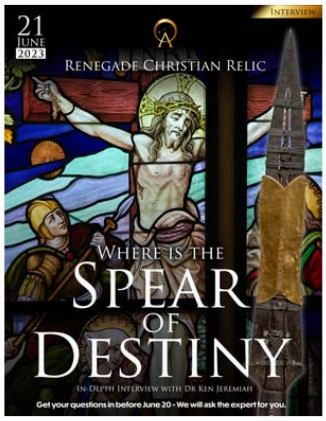

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Under the above-mentioned Midrar Dynasty, Sijilmasa grew into a regional power, and was able to free itself from the yoke of the Abbasid Caliphate as early as 771 AD, becoming largely independent. The rule of the Midrar Dynasty spread to the neighboring region, and was centered on the city of Sijilmasa. But, alas, every era of prosperity has to end at some point.

The Geopolitics of Sijilmasa: Navigating Power Struggles in the Sahara

In the 10th century, Sijilmasa's rulers experienced their first major problems. Two rival Caliphates began a major feud, fighting over the control of the African trade routes. These were real superpowers, and Sijilmasa could not compare, even with its wealth. These superpowers relied on powerful regional rulers to act in their stead. Sijilmasa's Midrar rulers were chosen by the Fatimids of Ifriqiya (modern-day Tunisia), while their rivals - the Umayyads of Cordoba - chose the rulers of Maghrawa confederation.

These alliances, however, were quick to shift and displace, and troubles soon arose in Sijilmasa. Around 909 AD, the Fatimids launched an expedition against Sijilmasa. For fifty days the city was in their hands, before it was again retaken by the Midrars. In 922, however, the Fatimids returned, and this time held the city for 20 years.

Sijilmasa remained a crucial trading hub, with its gold coin mints operating at full capacity. This time, however, the names of Fatimid caliphs were on these coins, and they went to different pockets. Needless to say, these events were fatal for the Midrar Dynasty, and its rapid disintegration began in this period. Eventually, it was the Maghraba **Berbers** - whose alliance shifted between Umayyad and Fatimid - that took hold of the city. It now became the major town of the Maghrawas, and continued its role as a trade center.

However, after six decades of Maghrawa rule, the elders of Sijilmasa had had enough. They sought the assistance of the Sanhaja Berber confederation, a major north African power, which was at that time transforming into the important **Almoravid** Dynasty. According to the Arab writer al-Bakri, the leader of the Almoravids mustered his armies and descended upon Sijilmasa, defeating the leader of the Maghrawa Berbers.

Alas, it was the Almoravids who ruled in Sijilmasa from that point on - and their rule was hardly welcome. For the Almoravids practiced an incredibly strict form of Islam. They banned all the instruments in the city, and closed wine shops and similar venues. The people of the city attempted a few revolts, but to no avail. Sijilmasa remained in Almoravid hands until 1146.

*Mud-brick ruins from the ancient city of Sijilmasa within the lush Tafilalt Oasis in Morocco. (**Mohammed** / Adobe Stock)*

Sijilmasa: A Pawn of Greater Powers

It was only in 1146 that the Almohad Caliphate took control of Sijilmasa. They were quick to take advantage of the town's wealth, and all the traffic that passed through it. Much to the misfortune of the citizens, their rule was equally as bad as that of the strict Almoravids. Although the Almohads were not that strict, they were awfully violent and oppressive. This was confirmed with a brutal massacre of all the Jews that lived in Sijilmasa. Their ruthless regime did not last for long, as the ruling powers once again changed in the city.

The Almohad Dynasty eventually fell, and the new Zenata Berber confederation was established as the new ruler of Sijilmasa, and most of **Morocco** as well. The change happened in the mid 14th century AD. In 1352, the esteemed Arab explorer Ibn Battuta wrote of Sijilmasa:

> *"I reached the city of Sijilmasa, a very beautiful city. It has abundant dates of*

> *good quality. The city of al-Basra is like it in the abundance of dates, but those of Sijilmasa are superior."*

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Sometimes in the late 14th century, after reaching its absolute peak of glory and wealth, Sijilmasa entered a steep decline. Economic fluctuations and increased rivalries between regional rulers, placed the city at increased risk. Around this time, a vicious civil war broke out, and Sijilmasa suffered widespread destruction. From this point on, even though it was partially rebuilt in different times during history, the city would still never attain the prosperity it had for centuries.

The Iberian scholar Leo Africanus traveled the area in the early 16th century, and stumbled upon the deserted ruins of the once-mighty Sijilmasa, writing:

> *"Of its walls, once so high, only a few sections remain, half-ruined, and covered with grass and moss. Of its population, there remain only various hostile clans, each living with its chief in a fortified village near to the ruins of the former Sijilmasa."*

The Tragic Fate of a Once Prosperous Metropolis

History does not know the exact reason why Sijilmasa was abandoned and destroyed after centuries of incredible prosperity. The likeliest reason, as evidenced from oral legends and travel writers, is that civil war and the rule of cruel despots doomed the city to its tragic fate. Climate change could have contributed as well, with a continued lack of resources plaguing the townsfolk.

At its height, Sijilmasa was the most prosperous town in the region. All the **gold** from the powerful **Mali Empire** ended up in the Sijilmasa mints, where it was struck into coins and placed into the global market. From there, it was transported to Egypt and Spain, and eventually made its way to Europe and the Mediterranean. Culture and arts flourished in the city, as did lavish **Islamic architecture** .

Alas, no golden age is destined to last forever. Today, only a few **mud-brick** walls and buildings remain of the vast oasis city that was Sijilmasa. After multiple destructions and rebuilds, the city never regained its former glory. Its fate serves as a valuable lesson in the history of affluent cities, subject to power struggles by covetous rulers.

*Top image: Remains of the ancient city of Sijilmasa within the lush Tafilalt Oasis in Morocco. Source: **Mohammed** / Adobe Stock*

By **Aleksa Vučković**

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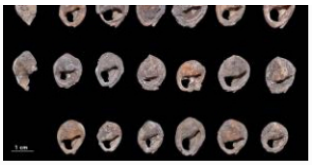

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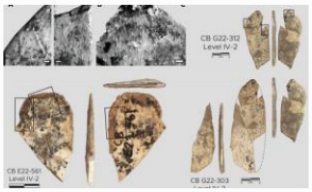

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ECHOES OF THE AGORA
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Uncovering the Truth Behind Matriarchal Societies in the Ancient World

View

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A theme common amongst the mythology of ancient cultures is a belief in the existence of a **Golden Age** , when humans lived uncorrupted, in peace and harmony, experiencing prosperity and societal stability. While the theme is common, there is much variation in its form and detail across those cultures. Some scholars believe that the foundation of this Golden Age in human prehistory was a **matriarchal society** . One in which **women ruled** ; a society underpinned by feminine values, until its collapse into patriarchy sometime between 10,000 and 5,000 years ago, leaving men and their male gods ruling society's values and structures.

For many, this Golden Age of Matriarchy is no more than a hopeful expression of feminist desire - a myth, now debunked, that at one time served the interests of a particular feminist vision but for which the evidence has been found lacking and the benefits of which to the feminist cause have been considered highly questionable.

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*The Garos are an indigenous people of india and are one of the last remaining matriarchal societies in the world. (Vishma Thapa / **CC BY-SA 4.0**)*

Definition of "Matriarchal" Society

However, so much of this analysis depends upon definition. Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth has lamented the lack of any clear definition of a **matriarchal society** . She considers the concept "so indistinct that nearly everyone could understand it in different ways". Clearly, the case for finding such a **prehistoric matriarchal society** will be at its weakest if a matriarchy is defined narrowly as simply the opposite of patriarchy, as a society "ruled" by women instead of men. On the other hand, if any non-patriarchal society is by its very nature considered matriarchal, there will clearly be far greater latitude in identifying such a societal framework in pre-history. Or is it somewhere between these two extremes that a true matriarchy is to be understood? In my view it is.

In seeking to identify the existence of a prehistoric **matriarchy** in which women "ruled", it is noteworthy that most anthropologists do not consider that there are, or ever have been, any societies that are known to be "matriarchal" in this sense. Their identification as "matriarchal" is considered to represent a confusion with a number of other related but distinct societal structures, such as matrilineal (tracing kinship through one's mother), matrilocal (families remain located close to the maternal line), and matrifocal (where the mother is head of the family).

Dr. Goettner-Abendroth has agreed that matriarchies will by definition never be found if one is looking simply for a society in which women take the "ruling" role of men that characterizes patriarchal societies. But this she argues is because a matriarchy will not be based on domination by any gender, but upon maternal values which will exhibit as caretaking and nurturing negotiation-oriented communities, with complementary equality for women and men alike.

So understood, she has found "abundant evidence" for the existence of many matriarchal societies, to be found today in Asia, America, and Africa. All, she notes, are " **gender egalitarian societies** , and many of them are fully egalitarian", with "no hierarchies, classes, nor domination of one gender by the other". Most academics exclude egalitarian societies from the concept of "matriarchy". In my view, they are mistaken in doing so.

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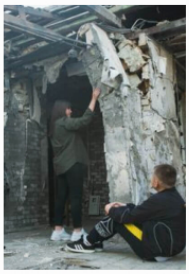

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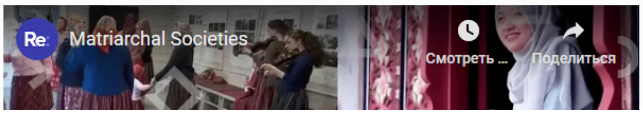

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Egalitarian Societies verses Patriarchal and Matriarchal Societies

Consistent with the well documented egalitarian structure of the world's oldest continuous culture, that of Australian Aboriginals, a 2015 study reported in *Science* of contemporary hunter gather communities (in the Congo and the Philippines) also found them to exhibit egalitarian social structures. Indeed, this study has merely confirmed numerous previous findings. Dr. Peter Gray has commented that:

> *"During the twentieth century, anthropologists discovered and studied dozens of different hunter-gatherer societies, in various remote parts of the world, who had been nearly untouched by modern influences. Wherever they were found - in Africa, Asia, South America, or elsewhere; in deserts or in jungles - these societies had many characteristics in common. … In each of these societies, the dominant cultural ethos was one that emphasized individual autonomy, non-directive childrearing methods, nonviolence, sharing, cooperation, and consensual decision-making. Their core value, which underlay all of the rest, was that of the equality of individuals."*

*Savanna Pumé couple on a hunting and gathering trip in the llanos of Venezuela. While the man hunts, and the woman gathers does that denote an equalitarian society? (Ajiimai / **CC BY-SA 4.0**)*

Importantly, the 2015 study also supported the evolutionary advantage that ancient hunter gatherer societies would similarly have enjoyed with egalitarian social structures, providing "the selective context for expanded social networks, cumulative culture, and cooperation among unrelated individuals." It is with the subsequent transition to agriculture and pastoralism that humans see the emergence of gender inequality, and the domination of **patriarchy** that now characterizes our Western society.

Venus Figurines – Do They Imply Matriarchal Rule?

In my view, ancient **hunter gatherer** communities were very likely egalitarian, and so matriarchal. In support of this conclusion, Dr. Simon Butler has noted that "[a]n apparent

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dominance of female representation in **prehistoric art** has been equated by some with female dominance or power in society, and to the existence of wide-ranging matriarchal or matrifocal societies prior to the emergence of patriarchies".
Amongst this prehistoric art, there are more than 200 representations of women in what are commonly described as " **Venus figurines** ". Found mostly in Europe and generally dating back to the Paleolithic era, as much as 40,000 years ago, he comments that they "have been variously interpreted as fertility symbols, lucky charms or toys, or as images of goddesses, priestesses, worshippers, ancestors or matriarchal rulers".

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*Venus of Hohlefels, the earliest Venus figurine, Paleolithic period, mammoth ivory, female representation in prehistoric art has been equated by some with female dominance or power implying a Matriarchy Society. (Ramessos / **CC BY-SA 3.0**)*

One of the more controversial claims is that they demonstrate the worship of a mother earth goddess, and in doing so support the view that these ancient cultures were matriarchal. Generalizations are of course dangerous and probably no single interpretation of their function would be true of all of the figurines. Moreover, Dr. Butler has correctly observed that in any event "any sacred status as goddesses does not necessarily imply increased social status for women."

However, whatever the ultimate merits of this claim, more significant to my mind is that these mostly palm-sized figurines commonly exhibit heads devoid of detail, but with large breasts, buttocks, hips and thighs, and legs that taper to a point at the feet. Dr. LeRoy McDermott has suggested that "these **anatomical details** do not add up to an accurate image of the human figure" simply because they reflect "the fixed angle of self-regard which accounts for both the odd 'realism of parts considered independently one from another' … and … [the] conclusion that the figures appear 'centered on the torso, breasts, thighs, and abdomen,' with the rest 'attenuated' or 'dwindling away' above and below". In other words, in at least some cases the woman represented has carved the figurine herself, looking from her own perspective down upon her

body.

While not without its critics, this interpretation of the origins of at least some of the figurines is to my mind quite compelling. Of course, as Dr. McDermott has recognized, "[i]dentifying where the artist stood when creating a representational work does not tell us what it meant to its creator or how it was used or seen by others", but in my view it does say something about the place of women in that community. It challenges the common assumption that these prehistoric figurines were carved only by men. It reflects a community in which women also enjoyed a role in its artistic life, whatever symbolic or other function/s the figurines otherwise had within the community.

Cave Art – Was it Matriarchal?

This is also supported by research that has suggested that women may be responsible for much ancient **cave art** . While human handprints (positive images) and human hand stencils (negative images) occur in cave art on every inhabited continent, the largest (and arguably most well-known) form part of the Upper Paleolithic **cave art** concentrated in southern France and northern Spain, generally dated to the period between 40,000 and 12,500 years ago. A study by Dr. Dean Snow, comparing hand size and finger lengths, has disproved the traditional assumption that this cave art was produced mainly, if not exclusively, by men. Indeed, to the contrary, Dr. Snow found that those who made the hand stencils in the caves were predominantly women.

*Cueva de las Manos located Perito Moreno, Argentina. This cave art dates between 13,000–9,000 BC. The hand stencils in the caves were made predominantly by women. (Marianocecowsk / **CC BY-SA 3.0**)*

Stone Tools – Made by Women

Similarly, stone tool production has generally been assumed to be an exclusively male activity in ancient communities. However, as early as 1991 the late Dr. Joan Gero concluded that women in prehistory "can be suspected of making as many **stone tools** as men". This conclusion has been supported by a more recent University of Florida study of an extant Ethiopian community where women were found to dominate the making of stone tools, and which the authors of the study consider suggests that women in prehistory probably similarly had an active part in creating stone tools.

While none of these studies in or of themselves tells us the nature of the gender structures of prehistoric **hunter gatherer** communities, they each show female participation in the economic, social, and cultural life of these communities in areas traditionally understood to have been the province solely of men. Taken together, they are at least suggestive of an egalitarian social structure in these communities.

*Tools from the Stone Age, whether in a Matriarchy Society and Patriarchy Society, it is determined that women were found to dominate the making of stone tools. (**ExQuisine** / Adobe)*

Animals Represented in Paleolithic Art

It is interesting too that the animals represented in **Paleolithic art** are not identical with those animals most economically important or hunted. Rather, Dr. Walpurga Antl-Weiser has noted that

animals most economically important or hunted. Rather, Dr. Walpurga Anti-Weiser has noted that species were chosen to be represented not merely because of their economic value but because they had a deeper meaning to the community. While there are regional choices as to which animals are represented, he identifies **mammoths** as having a supra regional importance throughout the Upper Paleolithic, while other animals represented included bison and lions.

In the modern world, elephants (with whom it appears mammoths shared a similar social structure), (North American) bison and lions are all matriarchal. As Dr. Anti-Weiser concludes that "[w]e can be rather sure that people reflected on the abilities and qualities of animals and compared some of these qualities with their own", it might legitimately be asked whether it was the matriarchal qualities of these species that inspired their representation, even if only in respect of some of the representations.

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*Drawings from the ceiling of Altamira cave in Spain, bison and lions are considered matriarchal. (**bereta** / Adobe)*

Venus-Style Figurines Pre-Dating Homo Sapiens

It is also interesting that other **Venus-style figurines** of an age pre-dating homo sapiens have been found in Israel and Morocco. The Venus of Berekhat Ram and the Venus of Tan-Tan have been claimed to be the earliest representations of the human form, dating to between 230,000 and 700,000 years ago and between 300,000 and 500,000 years ago respectively. Given their age, it is recognized that they would have been made by **Neanderthals** or perhaps even predating Neanderthals, being created by an earlier hominid like *Homo erectus* . In that regard, it may be noteworthy that **Neanderthal communities** are considered to have shared many of the basic social and demographic characteristics of modern hunter gatherer communities and indeed have been suggested to have been matriarchal.

*"Venus of Tan-Tan" (left) and "Venus of Berekhat Ram" (right), Museum of Human Evolution, Spain. (Dbachmann / **CC BY-SA 4.0**)*

On balance, there are strong grounds for concluding that the communities of our ancient hunter gatherer forebears were likely egalitarian in nature and so matriarchal in their social structures. Such societies are based upon maternal values, exhibiting as caretaking and nurturing negotiation-oriented communities, for women and men alike; a reality giving substance and form to the maligned mythology of a Golden Age of Matriarchy. Which only begs the question – What would our society be like if only we could escape the domination of patriarchal rule?

Top image: Matriarchal woman *Source: **wichansumalee** / Adobe Stock*

I would like to thank my friend and writing colleague, Ms. Marianne Schmidt, for her insightful comments in the development of this note.

By **Dr. Philip Jamieson**

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Dr Philip Jamieson is a retired former academic and researcher who now pursues his interests in ancient cultures, mythology, animal welfare, spirituality and the environment. Based in Brisbane, Australia, he is a frequent traveler in pursuit of his quest for... **Read More**

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Darya Saltykova: Cruel Russian Aristocrat with a Taste for Murder

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In 1768, Darya Nokolayevna Ivanova Saltykova, better known as *Saltychikha*, was found guilty for the murder of 139 serfs under her care. Of that number, only 38 were confirmed due to the

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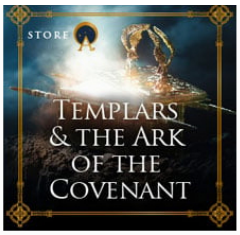

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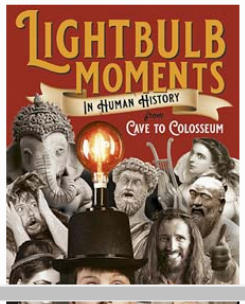
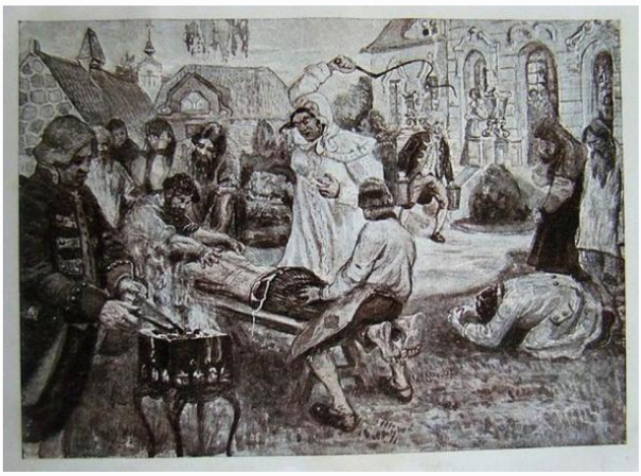


immense fear she instilled in witnesses who could have testified against her. She killed many women, several children, a few men, and even attempted to kill a nobleman. The Russian imperial court imposed a life sentence, and as a display of public justice, Saltykova was taken to the Red Square in **Moscow** and publicly beaten for over an hour wearing a sign that read: "This woman tortured and murdered." She then her remaining years chained up in the basement of a monastery, before dying on November 2, 1801, mentally broken and alone.

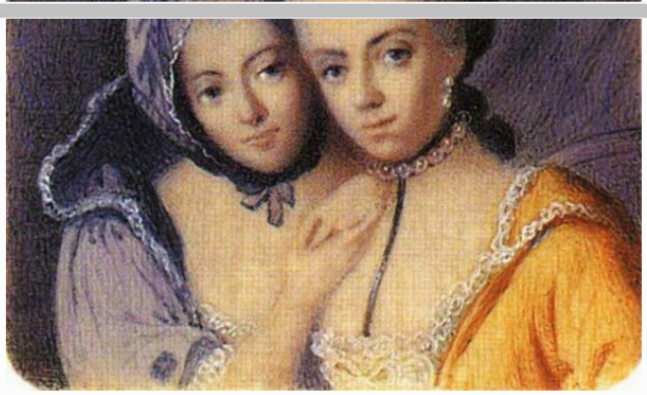
Though her incarceration experience was horrific, Darya was indeed a monster who inspired fear, particularly for young women. During an extensive six-year investigation, the serfs who lived on or near her vast estate were terrified of incurring her wrath. An abusive unchecked aristocrat, she inflicted cruelty to those around her. Since her death, her legend has grown to a point whereby it is based more on fiction than on reality, which makes it hard to truly understand her motives, if any existed. With the little information that remains about her viciousness and cruelty, can we still call her a serial killer, or was she an abusive Russian landowner, like many of her



*guilty for the death of 139 serfs under her care. (**Public domain**)*

Opulence and Glamor: Early Life of Darya Saltykova

On November 3rd 1730, Darya Nikolayevna Ivanova was born to Nikolai Avtonomovich Ivanov and Anna Ivanovna Davydova. As with most aristocrats of the time, Darya's life was one of opulence and glamor. Her family enjoyed connections to an elite circle of wealth, including the **Tolstoy's**, Davidov's, and Musin-Pushkins. Though little is known about her early childhood, she grew up during a time when wealthy Russians were in a hurry to adopt customs and material goods from Western Europe. As a result of this westernization of Russian culture, Darya may have grown up wearing ostentatious French and Italian dresses, not to mention eating pastries made by imported European chefs. These extravagances would only be available to the wealthiest of Russians, who still owned large tracts of land and presided over the poorest of serfs.



*Darya Saltykova's life was one of opulence and glamor. (**Public domain**)*

Darya didn't show signs of cruelty or malevolence, and appeared to be a completely normal Russian noblewoman. Sometime in the 1750's, at the age of 20, Darya married the Imperial officer Gleb Alexeyevich Saltykov and found herself holding immense power within the Russian

Sergei Saltykov, was rumored to be the lover of **Catherine the Great** , as well as the true father of Paul I of Russia. Meanwhile, Gleb's nephew, Nikolai Saltykov, was the royal tutor for Catherine's children.

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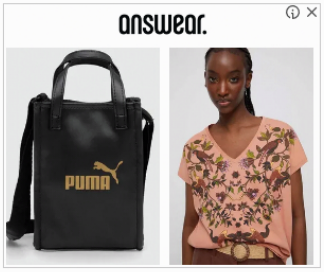

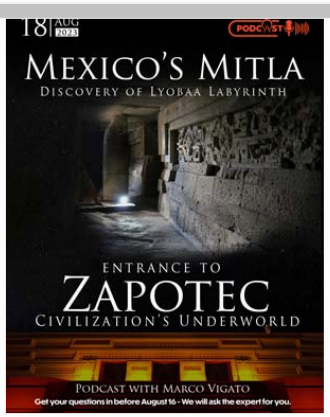

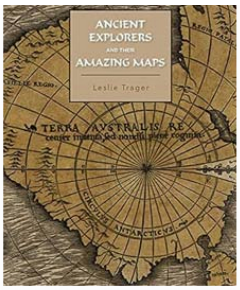

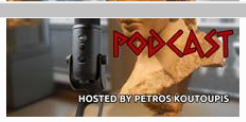

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Darya gave birth to two sons by Gleb, Theodore and Nicholas, with whom she spent little time. They were sent away for their schooling, leaving Darya alone on her estate. When Gleb died of unknown causes in 1755, Darya was left a wealthy widow at the age of 25. In charge of the Troitskoe estate, as well as several other properties, she was responsible for over 600 serfs. As if a character from a tragic Russian fairytale, Darya rapidly transformed from being a wealthy 25-year-old widower into the vile *Saltychikha*. While no evidence has been found to explain this dramatic metamorphosis, legend has it that the change was triggered by the actions of an unfaithful lover.

Becoming *Saltychikha*: What Triggered the Beast?

Shortly after the death of her husband, Darya was courted by the land surveyor Nikolay Tyutchev, grandfather of future poet Fydor Tyutchev. Whether their affair began before or after the death of her husband, we'll never know, but it appears that Nikolay had no intention of marrying Darya. Instead, he rejected her and eloped with a younger, **red-haired woman** . Shortly after Saltykova got word of the elopement, she ordered her serfs to burn Tyutchev's house to the ground, and then proceeded to send assassins to kill them both. Luckily, Nikolay and his bride received word of the assassination attempt and fled to **Moscow**.

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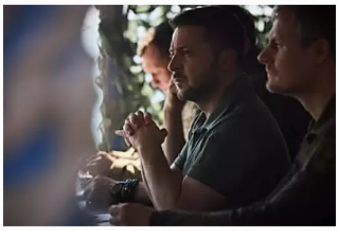

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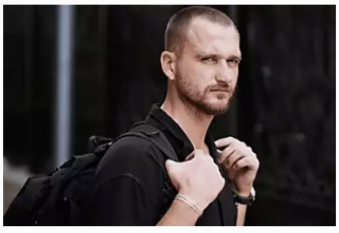

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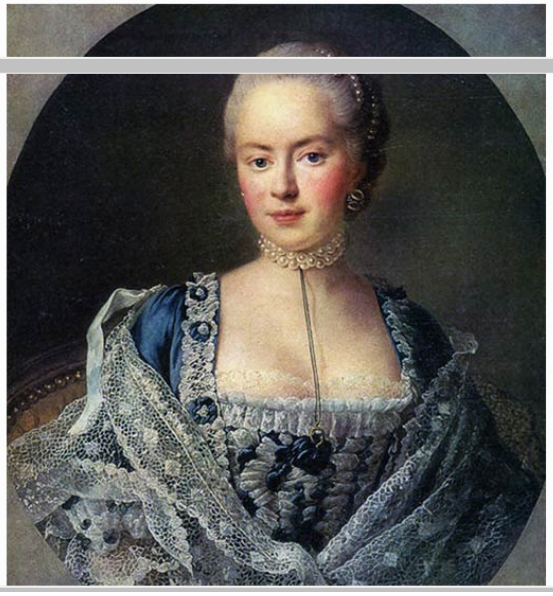

*Portrait of Countess Darya Petrovna Saltykova. (**Public domain**)*

Though this historic rumor adds an intriguing twist to her **murderous** rampage, and conveniently ties her story to the destiny of future poet Fydor Tyutchev, there isn't enough historic evidence to verify its veracity. Some versions claim Nikolay simply lost interest and stopped visiting Darya, while others contend that he grew tired of her violent treatment of her servants and left without Darya noticing. Regardless of the events leading to Darya's emergence as a ravenous murderer, scholars and storytellers alike believe the transformation began five to ten years after the death of her husband.

Darya the Tormentor: The Serial Killer and Her Methods

Darya's preferred choice of victim, young servant women, may explain why the legend of her unrequited love found its way into the history books. All in all, she is supposed to have murdered 137 women and three men. The male deaths, apparently, were accidental. Several accounts maintain that Darya's violent mood swings were to blame for most of her servant's deaths. It seems she never intended to kill them, merely discipline them so they wouldn't repeat their mistakes.

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There was a variable range to her violent temper and abuse. At the slightest offense, she would begin with throwing objects at serfs and servants she felt were lazy or incompetent. On the other end of the scale, she is said to have stepped on the belly of a pregnant woman, killed the wife of a hated male serf, and in some accounts, performed acts of cannibalism. The other cruelties, for which Darya became infamous, were the burning of hair, throwing servant girls outside, naked, in the dead of Russian winter, the pouring of boiling water from head to toe, the severing of ears with hot pokers, and whipping her female servants until the bones of their backs were exposed.

*Saltytchikha was known for her enraged fits of cruelty, usually enacted against women. (**V. Pletchine**)*

In another testament to her cruelty, she is said to have become enraged with one male serf she deemed ungrateful and plotted to kill his wife. On succeeding in this endeavor, she continued to torment the serf: When he remarried, she proceeded to kill his second wife, and then his third. Darya's plan was to break the spirit of the man who failed at showing her respect, and watch him suffer. Given her wealth and her family connections to the Russian royal family, her abusive crimes on her estate were able to continue for almost ten years before anyone brought this to the attention of the Imperial court. So, why did this continue for so long? Did it have to do with her wealth alone, or was there a cultural aspect that is often overlooked, such as the treatment of Russian serfs?

Serfdom and the Russian Elite

During 17 th century Imperial Russia, serfdom was a form of feudal slavery whereby people were tied to the land in which they dwelled. Serfs were the legal property of whichever landowning

noblemen owned the land. Serfs had few rights and were subject to whatever rules noblemen saw fit. Though it was technically illegal to sell serfs without their land, many noblemen continued the practice quietly, changing the terminology from "peasant and land" to "hiring servants."

Most noblemen had complete ownership and dominance over the lives of their serfs. Before the being traded, bought, sold, and exploited. With such a notorious culture of **human slavery** , with people being owned and traded as commonplace, could Darya Saltykova's treatment of her serfs have been commonplace among the upper elites of Imperial Russia?

*Peasants Reading the Emancipation Manifesto, a painting by Grigory Myasoyedov from 1873. Before the Great Emancipation of 1861, which effectively abolished serfdom, over 20 million privately owned serfs were being traded, bought, sold, and exploited. (**Public domain**)*

Because of Darya's immense wealth and her intimate connections with the **Romanov family** , most Russian authorities ignored the rumors regarding abuse and murder taking place on her land. In some cases, those who were brave enough to bring attention to her activities were punished. It wasn't until 1762 that relatives of some of the victims were able to escape to **St. Petersburg** and bring a petition to Catherine the Great herself. The serf who had lost three wives to Darya's wrath, was one of them.

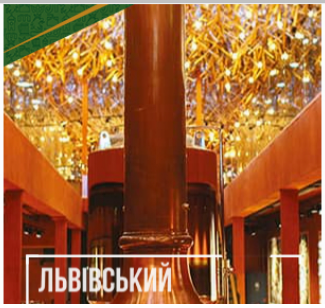
The petition pleaded with the Empress to save the serfs from Saltykova's horrors and provide justice for the young female serfs murdered on her land. Catherine had no choice but to try Darya Saltykova publicly and have the Collegium of Justice investigate the crimes conducted within her estate.

After six years of analysis and examination based on eyewitness accounts, and excavations throughout her estate, in 1768 Darya was found guilty of 38 murders and 139 deaths under mysterious circumstances. Catherine the Great dictated life in prison for Darya Saltykova at the Ivanovski Convent in Moscow. The life sentence came with its own cruel and unusual punishments, all of which were rightfully deserved.

*Catherine the Great of Russia (1729-1796) dictated life in prison for Darya Saltykova at the Ivanovski Convent in Moscow. (**Public domain**)*

Dark Solitary Confinement for Darya Saltykova

For the next 33 years, Darya Saltykova was kept chained to the wall of the **dungeon** with no access to luxury comforts, including candlelight. She sat in dark solitary confinement for the duration of her natural life. By the time of her death, at the age of 71 on November 27 th 1801, Darya Nokolayevna Ivanova Saltykova was a broken woman who suffered from severe mental



illness, cursing, swearing and spitting at whoever walked past the barred window that served as her only connection with the outside world. Her remains were buried at the Donskoy Monastery Necropolis.

Darya's story is one of both intrigue and justice served, but given the history of human **serfdom** and the disconnection between the wealthy and the poor of 18 th century Imperial Russia, would Darya Saltykova be considered a serial killer by modern standards?

*Darya Saltykova was sentenced to life in prison at the Ivanovski Convent, known as the St. John the Baptist Convent, in Moscow, which had long served as a prison for ladies of royal and noble blood. She sat in dark solitary confinement for the duration of her natural life. (**Public domain**)*

Applying Psychological Analysis of Serial Killers to the *Saltychikha* Case

To paraphrase the works of both Peter Vronsky and former FBI agent John Douglas, a few traits must be explored regarding profile, method, and execution in the *Saltychikha* case. From their modern analysis of several cases going back 30 years, the drive of most female serial killers differs greatly from that of male serial killers. Firstly, most female killers kill for socioeconomic gain. Secondly, if there are any sexual components, there is a 44% chance that the female serial killer is partnered by a dominant male accomplice. Thirdly, a majority of female serial killers are often from working-class families in which violence and abuse are commonplace, therefore making their killings an effect of survival. Finally, most female serial killers that come from a higher socioeconomic status will suffer from some kind of psychological disorder.

Some discrepancies arise when comparing this analysis of serial killers to the case of Darya Saltykova. First of all, she didn't kill her husband. Secondly, she was accused of sexually torturing her servants. Vronsky claims that sexual deviance murders usually include a male accomplice, but Darya acted alone. Thanks to the authority given by her title, she did so in the open, without fear of reprisals. The only possible alternative would be that she suffered from a psychological disorder.

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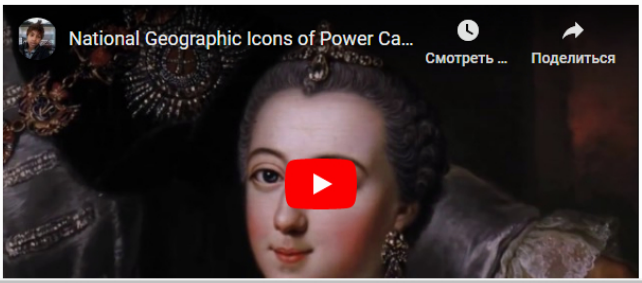
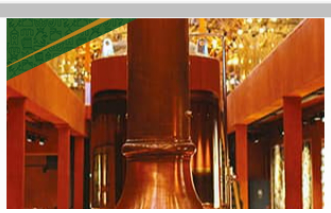
There are several types of **serial killers** . The most recognizable are the organized serial killers and the unorganized ones. An organized serial killer typically follows seven psychological phases during their hunt, while an unorganized serial killer may only facilitate three to five of the seven phases. These phases consist in fantasy, hunting or stalking, seduction or luring, trap or capture, the murder, the trophy totem, and finally, post homicidal depression or satisfaction. Most organized serial killers follow an obsessive pattern of slaughter, which will be almost the same in every kill. Unorganized killers will often kill quickly without a significant pattern or type. Both groups will take some form of a trophy as a reminder of their kill.



Though analysis of Darya Saltykova demonstrates significant signs of mental illness, she never revealed any form of sexual fantasy, nor did she keep trophies from any of the girls she killed. If the legends are true, her actions were a demonstration of dominance and power over the 600 serfs she owned. There is also no record of her savoring or taking a break after every kill. Her brutish abuse and cruelty appeared to be continuous. Darya Nikolayevna Ivanova Saltykova was



responsible for the torture and death of 139 of her serfs. However, is it correct to conclude that she was a serial killer? After all, could it be possible that Catherine the Great made an example of her cruelty in order to scare the many other cruel **Russian** landowners who treated their serfs just as badly?

*Portrait of Countess Darya Petrovna Saltykova. (**Public domain**)*

that evidence contained in various accounts points to Saltykova having suffered from an antisocial personality disorder (APD): she disregarded and violated the rights of others, in many ways she did not conform to social norms, and she demonstrated immense irritability and aggressiveness. These three aspects to her personality are indeed textbook definitions of APD. Perhaps Darya Saltykova was not a serial murderer, but merely an individual suffering from severe mental disorder, with tragic consequences.

*Top image: Darya Saltykova, aka Saltychikha, was an abusive and unchecked aristocrat, known for murdering 139 serfs on Yroitskoe estate near Moscow in Russia. Adapted from Portrait of Countess Darya Petrovna Saltykova by François-Hubert Drouais. Source: **Public domain***

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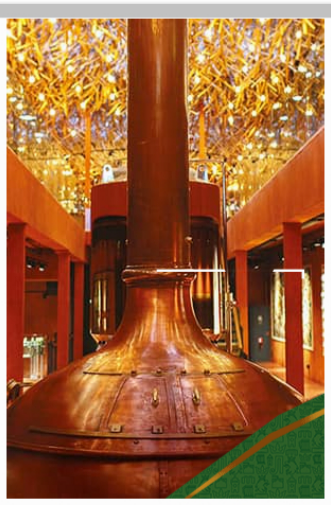

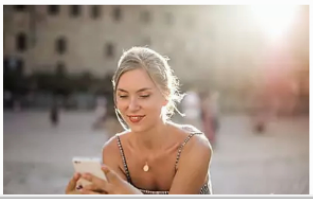

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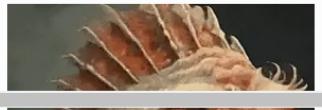

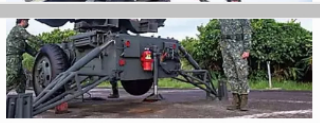

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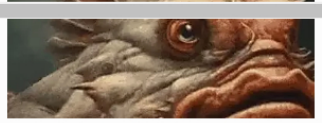

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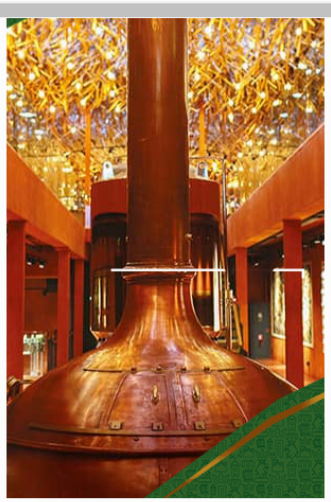

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Causing a Ruckus as the Ruthless Pirate Hayreddin Redbeard

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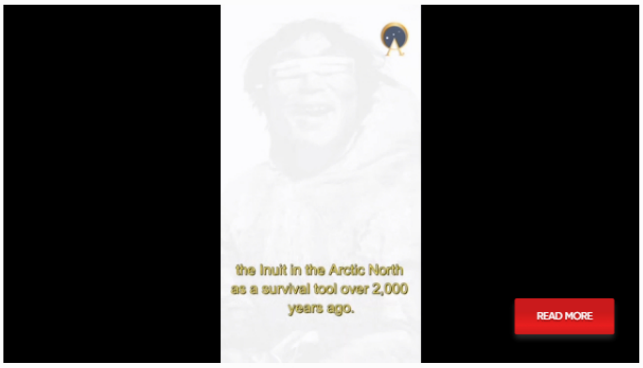
Hayreddin Barbarossa, also known as Redbeard, was one of the most notorious pirates of his day. Together with his older brothers, Ishak and Aruj, they conquered the North African city of Algiers and submitted it to the Ottomans, as a means of protecting themselves from the Spanish.



Nevertheless, this did not stop the Spanish from attacking Tlemcen in 1518, a city located near Algiers which was under the rule of Hayreddin and his brother. During this siege, Ishak and Aruj lost their lives. As a result, Hayreddin inherited his brother Aruj's position as the ruler of Algiers and continued to serve the **Ottoman Empire** . It was during this post-Aruj period that Hayreddin continued his privateering / pirating activities and created a name for himself, thus ensuring a place for himself in the history books.

The Life and Names of Hayreddin Barbarossa, a.k.a. Redbeard

Hayreddin Barbarossa was originally known as Khizr or Khidr. Born on the Greek island of **Lesbos** around 1478, Hayreddin had three brothers. By 1518 he was the only one left, as the all

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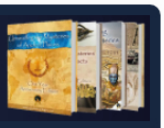

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his brothers had been killed during combat.

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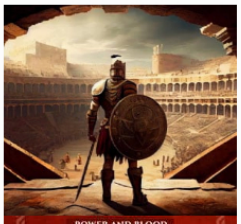

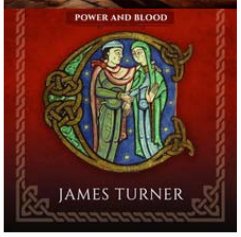

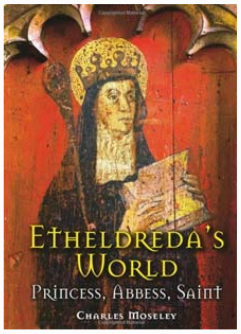

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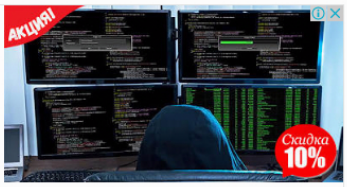

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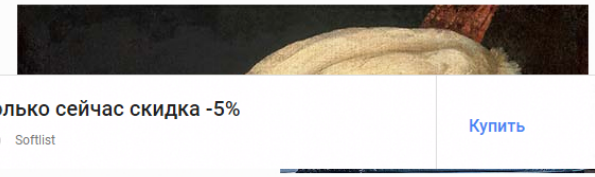
When **Aruj** was killed at Tlemcen, Hayreddin not only inherited the rulership of **Algiers**, but also his brother's nickname amongst the Europeans—the Italian name *Barbarossa* meaning "Redbeard"—due to his red-colored beard. On the subject of names, *Hayreddin* has been translated into English as "goodness" or "best of the religion" and was an honorary title given to the **pirate** by the Ottoman sultan, **Suleiman the Magnificent** .



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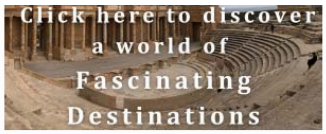
*Suleiman I was the tenth and longest-reigning Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, from 1520 to his death in 1566. (**Public domain**)*

Hayreddin Redbeard's Ottoman Connections

Although the Spanish had captured Tlemcen around the middle of 1518, Hayreddin Redbeard was able, with fresh troops sent by the Ottomans, to recapture the city at the end of the same year. In retaliation, the following year a joint Spanish-Italian force attacked Algiers, though Redbeard was able to repel them and soon had his vengeance when he raided the French region of Provence in the same year.

- **Aruj Barbarossa: Most Notorious Pirate of the Barbary Corsairs**
- **The Ottoman Empire: 600 Years of Domination**

In 1520, the Ottoman Sultan Selim I died and was succeeded by his son **Suleiman the Magnificent** . In return for the services of his pirate fleet, Hayreddin Redbeard requested the new sultan for further Ottoman protection for North Africa from the Spanish threat. When this was granted by Suleiman, Redbeard's fleet immediately began raiding the French and Spanish coast.



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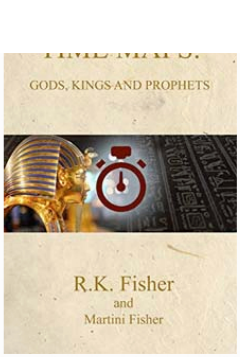

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Then, in 1522, Redbeard contributed to the conquest of **Rhodes** by sending his ships under the command of one of his subordinates, Kurtoğlu. Rhodes was the stronghold of the **Knights of St. John** —Christian **pirates** who often raided Ottoman vessels in the western Mediterranean. Thus, their expulsion was a removal of a thorn in the side of the Ottomans.

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Whilst Hayreddin Redbeard was on a military expedition to Habsburg Austria in the following year, Doria captured several cities on the coast of the Greek mainland. Although the Ottomans successfully recaptured these cities, it was then that the sultan realized the importance of having a strong navy to protect Ottoman interests in the Mediterranean from the seasoned seamen of Europe, including the Genoese and the **Venetians**. As a result, Redbeard was summoned to the court in **Constantinople** and was appointed the admiral of the Ottoman fleet.

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*The Battle of Preveza, in September 1538, was a historic naval battle between the Ottoman navy under Hayreddin Redbeard and the Western Christian navy under Captain Andrea Doria. (Actia Nicopolis Foundation / **CC BY 4.0**)*

A Capable Naval Commander: Hayreddin Redbeard and the Battle of Preveza

Hayreddin Redbeard did not let his patron down and continued his raids on Christian Europe. He proved his capabilities as a naval commander once again in 1538. This time, a Holy League was assembled by Pope Paul III, led by Andrea Doria. The Genoese admiral commanded a fleet consisting of vessels belonging to the Papal States, the Spanish Empire, the Knights of Malta and the Republics of Genoa and Venice.

- **10 Of The Most Famous Pirates, Male and Female, Who Ruled the Seas!**
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The Battle of Preveza , which took place on the 28th of September 1538, resulted in another victory for Redbeard and ensured that the eastern Mediterranean would be dominated by the Ottomans until the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.

*Tomb of Hayreddin Redbeard in the Beşiktaş district of Istanbul. (Darwinek / **CC BY-SA 3.0**)*

Redbeard's Loyalty and Peaceful End

Hayreddin Redbeard continued to serve the Ottoman Empire loyally. For instance, when Charles V attempted to bribe the **pirate** to switch sides, it is said that he refused the offer outright.

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Additionally, the raids of coastal cities continued. Some, such as the Genoese, eventually gave up trying to defeat **Hayreddin Redbeard** , and chose to pay tribute in order to be spared from being attacked. At one point of time, the Ottomans entered into an alliance with the French, and Redbeard found himself defending southern France from Spanish attack during this time.

A truce was finally reached between the Ottomans and the Spanish in 1544. In the following

*Tomb of Hayreddin Redbeard in the Beşiktaş district of Istanbul. (Darwinek / **CC BY-SA 3.0**)*

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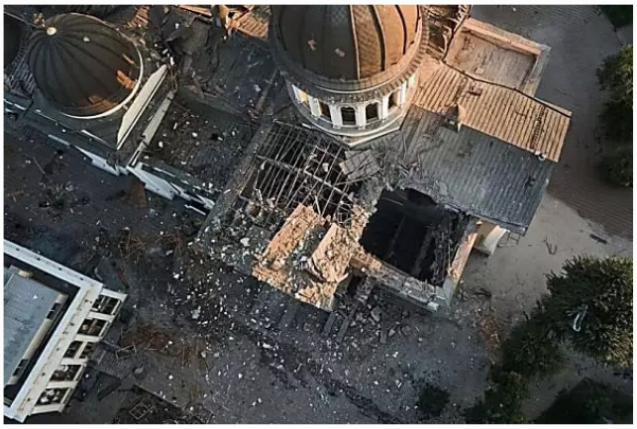

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Wu Mingren ('Dhwty') has a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient History and Archaeology. Although his primary interest is in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, he is also interested in other geographical regions, as well as other time periods.... **Read More**

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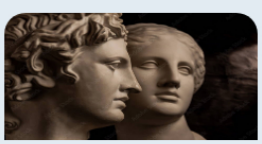

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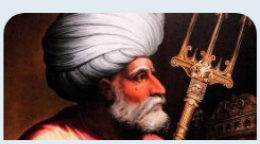

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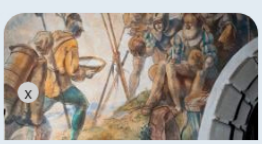

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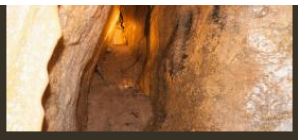

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*Medieval Persian manuscript depicting Muhammad leading Abraham, Moses and Jesus in prayer. (**Public Domain**)*

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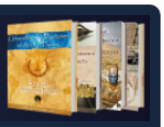

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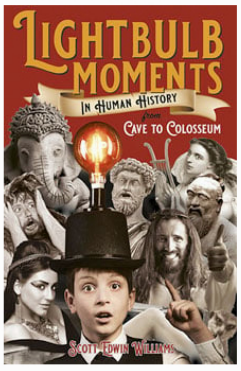

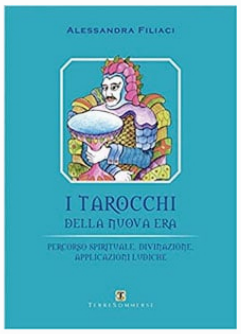

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hometown of Mecca and soon gained a following. By 615, a community of believers had grown around the Prophet, and in 622, seeing Muhammad as a threat, the Quraysh, who were in control of Mecca, forced him and his followers out of the city. Muhammad embarked on the *hijrah* (journey) to Medina, where he was welcomed by the local Muslims.

*1307 Depiction of Mohammed receiving his first revelation from the angel Gabriel. (**Public Domain**)*

At Medina, the Prophet was able to establish an Islamic government and he became a religious, political, and military leader. In 630, Medina had grown strong enough for Muhammad to march an army against Mecca. The city was conquered with minimum bloodshed. Two years later, the Prophet died, by which time the whole of the Arabian Peninsula had come under the control of Islam.

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*The Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim Army at the Battle of Uhud, from the Siyer-i Nebi, 1595. (**Public Domain**)*

The Rashidun Caliphate Expand the Islamic State

The Prophet Muhammad was succeeded by four caliphs, known collectively as the **Rashidun** (meaning 'rightly guided) Caliphate. The four caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn Abi Talib, led the Islamic state from the death of Muhammad to 661. Although the Rashidun Caliphate lasted merely 29 years, it made a huge expansion to the territory ruled by Islam. It was during this period that the Levant, Egypt, large parts of North Africa, and Persia were conquered by the Muslims.

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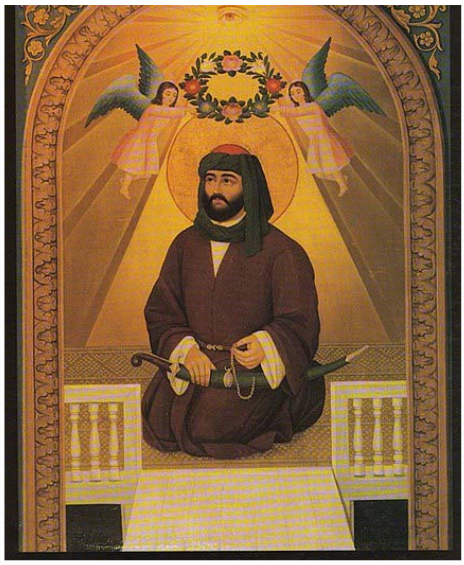

*Alī bin Abī Ṭālib by Hakob Hovnatanyan (c. 19th century). (**Public Domain**)*

Despite the military successes of the Muslim armies, the Islamic state was not without internal conflict. The question of succession had already risen immediately following the death of Muhammad, and this issue would split the Muslims into several factions. According to the Shiites, for instance, the first three Rashidun caliphs were not legitimate, and only Ali was the rightful successor of the Prophet. On the other hand, Ali came into conflict with many of his brethren, especially with those who allegedly wanted to avenge the assassination of Uthman.

Civil War Breaks Out

As a consequence, the First Fitna, a civil war in the Rashidun Caliphate, broke out in 656. The civil war lasted until Ali's death at the hands of the Kharijites in 661. Ali was succeeded by his son, Hasan ibn Ali, who, in order to prevent further bloodshed, concluded a peace treaty with Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, and a major opponent of Ali in the First Fitna. Although Hasan agreed to hand over political power to Muawiyah, one of the conditions placed on the latter was that a dynasty would not be established after his death.

*Combat between the forces of Ali and Muawiyah I during the Battle of Siffin, from the Tarikhnama. (**Public Domain**)*

Muawiyah, however, reneged on his promise and the **Umayyad Caliphate** , which had a dynastic and hereditary succession, was established. Under the Umayyad caliphs, Islam continued to spread, and western North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent, as well as parts of Central Asia were brought under Islamic rule. The Umayyad Caliphate lasted until 750, when it was overthrown in a rebellion / revolution by the Abbasids, who in turn established the next caliphate. The surviving male members of the Umayyad dynasty were hunted down and killed, though some succeeded in escaping to the Iberian Peninsula, where they established a new regime.

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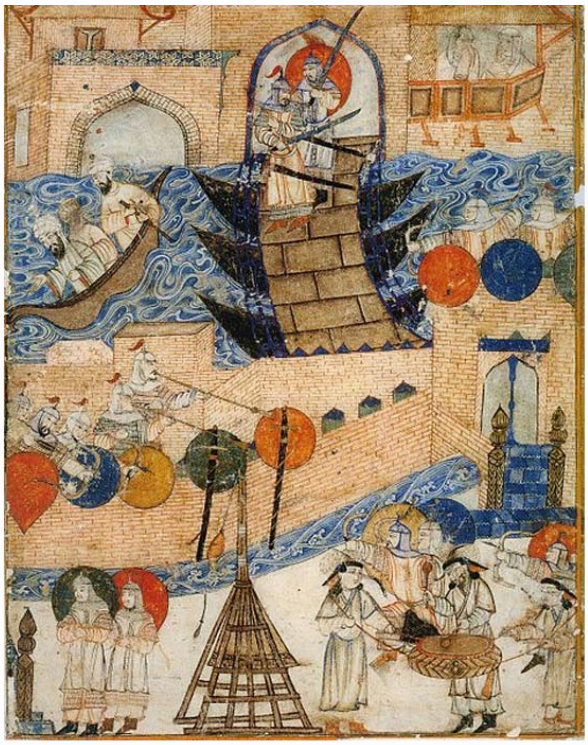
The Slow Demise of Caliphates

The Abbasid Caliphate lasted until 1517, though for the last few centuries of its existence, its caliphs did not wield any real power. The Abbasid Golden Age lasted from the 8th to the 9th centuries, during which time the Abbasid caliphs resided in Baghdad. By the end of the 9th century, however, the caliphate began to decline, and the Abbasid caliph al-Mustakfi was overthrown by the Buyids in 945. The Abbasids only returned to power in 1194, though the sacking of Baghdad by **the Mongols** in 1258 effectively brought the Abbasid Caliphate to an end.



*Conquest of Baghdad by the Mongols 1258. (**Public Domain**)*

Nevertheless, some members of the Abbasid Dynasty survived, and one of them, Al-Mustansir, found his way to Cairo, which was under the rule of the Mamluks. Al-Mustansir was proclaimed the new Abbasid caliph, though he was little more than a religious figurehead. The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo lasted until 1517, when the title of Caliph was claimed by the Ottomans who had conquered Egypt. This title was used by the **Ottoman sultans** until 1924, when the caliphate was abolished following the creation of the Republic of Turkey.

*Top image: 9th century painting of Jean Baptist Huysmans showing an Islamic Egyptian family during an evening prayer. Source: Cool Art/ **CC BY NC SA 2.0***

By **Wu Mingren**

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Wu Mingren ('Dhwty') has a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient History and Archaeology. Although his primary interest is in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, he is also interested in other geographical regions, as well as other time periods.... **Read More**

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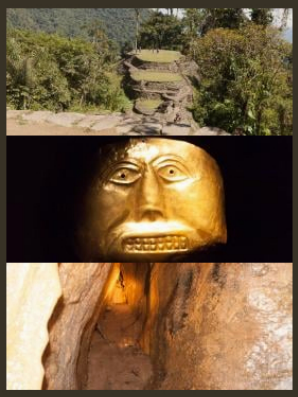

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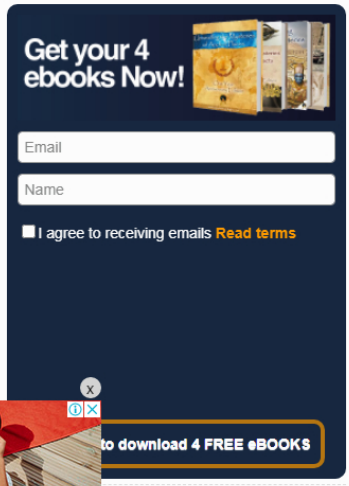
Muhammad I Askia (also known as Askia the Great) was one of the **most important emperors** of the Songhai Empire. Askia came to power in 1493, when he overthrew the last ruler of the Sunni Dynasty, Sunni Baru, and established the Askia Dynasty.



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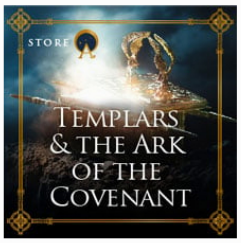

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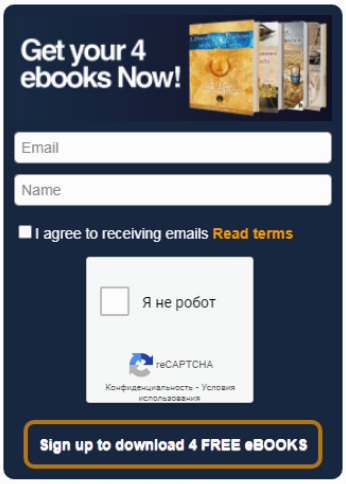

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He was a capable ruler, who not only expanded his realm, but also increased the efficiency of his empire's administration through **reforms**. Askia's fortunes fell in his later years, as he was deposed by one of his own sons. But after spending several years in **exile**, he was recalled to the capital Gao, where he died shortly after.

Little is known about Askia the Great's origins. Although the date and place of his birth are unknown, his original name is recorded to have been Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ture. Based on his birth name, Askia is thought to have been of Tukulor origin and he may have belonged to a

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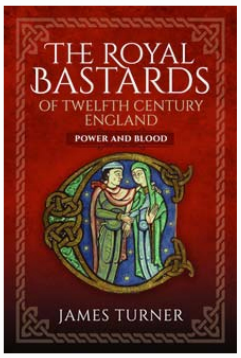

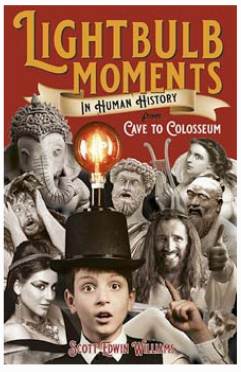

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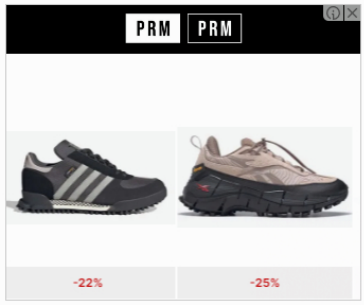
Son of a Djinn: Muhammad I Askia's Claim to the Throne

It is unsurprising that little has been recorded about Askia's early life, as he was neither related to the ruling Sunni Dynasty nor to any other known royal family . Thus, his family background made him an insignificant figure at that point in time.

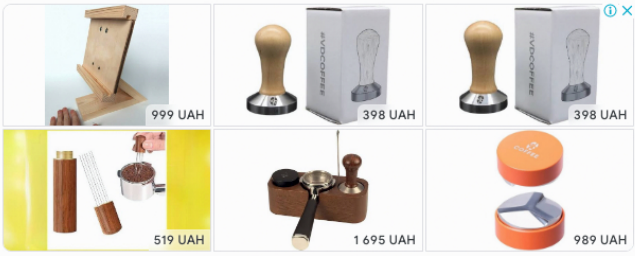


Additionally, as Askia was not of royal blood , he did not have any legitimate claim to the throne.

Askia came to power by overthrowing the Sunni Dynasty. Between 1464 and 1492, the Songhai Empire prospered under the rule of Sunni Ali. His successor, Sunni Baru, however, was a much less capable emperor and the dynasty came to an end just a year after Sunni Ali's death.

Muhammad I Askia Leads the Revolt

One of the issues faced throughout Sunni Ali's reign was the division between the inhabitants of the countryside, who continued their pagan practices, and those of the cities, who had embraced Islam . While Sunni Ali successfully balanced the interests of both parties, Sunni Baru favored his rural subjects. As a consequence, Sunni Baru was regarded as a traitor to Islam and dissatisfaction among the urban Muslims grew. This quickly developed into a full-blown revolt, which was led by Askia.



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Despite having numerical superiority, Sunni Baru failed to exploit this advantage and his army

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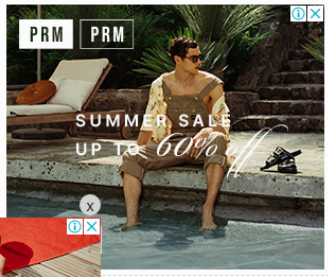

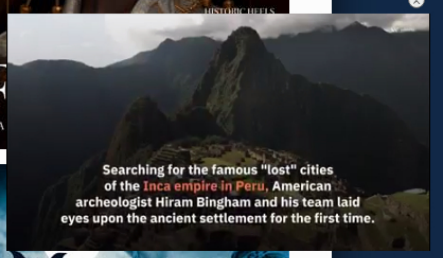

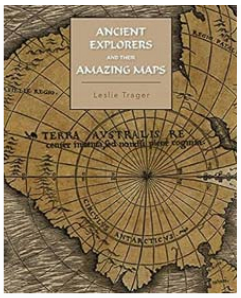

was decisively defeated by the rebels at the Battle of Anfao on the April 12, 1493. Sunni Baru was deposed and went into exile, thus marking the end of the Sunni Dynasty.

*Muhammad I Askia was dubbed Askia the Great. (Afric Network / **YouTube**)*

It was after this event that the title 'Askia' was adopted by the new ruler of the Songhai Empire. Some sources state that this name translates to mean 'forceful one', while others claim that it was derived from 'a si tya' (meaning 'he will not be'), which is a reference to the insult hurled at him by the women of the deposed Sunni Dynasty. In the latter case, the adoption of 'Askia' was meant to ridicule these women.

Askia the Great Establishes His Rule

As ruler of the Songhai Empire, Askia sought to enhance the status of Islam in his realm, which is reflected in some of the administrative reforms he instituted. For instance, the Quran became the foundation of the state's civil code and al-Maghili, a Moroccan reformer, was appointed as the emperor's adviser in matters of religious orthodoxy.

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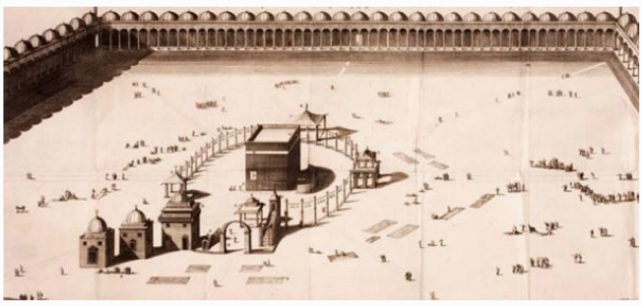
It was also Askia who established Islam as the official religion of the nobles, which is another sign of his commitment to this religion. Moreover, in 1496, Askia went on the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to **Mecca**. According to a chronicler who accompanied the emperor on the pilgrimage, the djinn of **Mecca** appointed Askia caliph and told him his rights over the former vassals of the Sunnis.



*Mecca in 1718. (**Public Domain**) In 1496 Askia went on the hajj to Mecca.*

Other administrative reforms initiated by Askia were of a civil or military nature. For instance, he divided the Songhai Empire into provinces, each of which was administered by a governor. This allowed Askia to consolidate the regions conquered by his Sunni predecessors by placing them under an efficient administration. Askia also organized a standing army and a **fleet of canoes**

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under the command of a general and an admiral, respectively. Moreover, Askia appointed officials who oversaw various aspects of the empire, including its finance, **agriculture**, and judiciary.

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While he was an exceptional statesman, Askia did not fare as well as a **military leader** . He was victorious in some campaigns, but met defeat in others. Nevertheless, the size and power of the Songhai Empire was unmatched in **West Africa** during Askia's reign and its influence was felt well beyond its borders.

Askia's Tomb

In 1528, Askia was deposed by his eldest son, Musa, who ruled for three years before being assassinated by his brothers. Musa was succeeded by Benkan, one of Askia's nephews. In order to secure his power, Benkan had his uncle banished onto an island in the **Niger River** and he was forced to stay there until 1537. In that year, Benkan was deposed by one of Askia's sons, Ismail, who became the new ruler of the Songhai Empire. Askia was invited back to Gao by his son and as a reward gifted Ismail his green turban and sabre.

The founder of the Askia Dynasty died in the following year and was buried in Gao. An earthen **pyramid** surmounted by wooden spikes was erected over his **burial place** and it remains one of the most revered sites in West **Africa** today.

*Tomb of Askia the Great. (Mattes / **CC BY-SA 3.0**)*

*Top image: Askia the Great, ruler of the Songhai Empire 1493 to 1528, in the Game Civilization V. Source: **Civilization Wiki***

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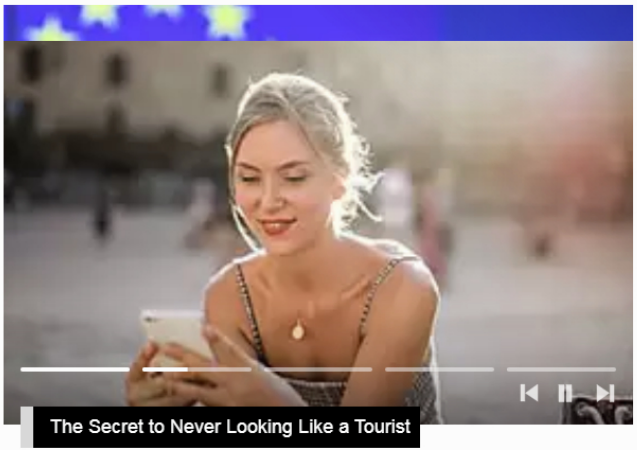

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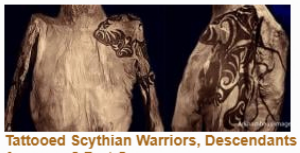

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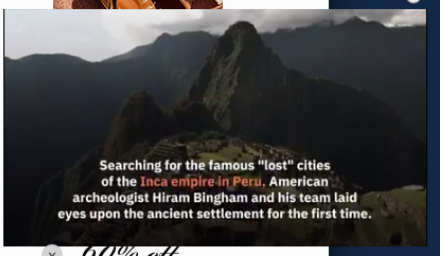

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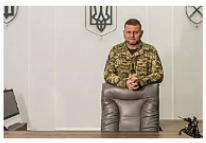

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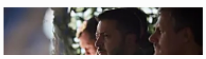

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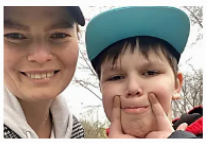

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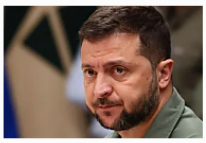

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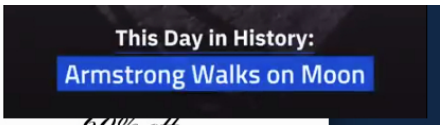

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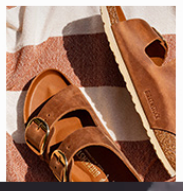

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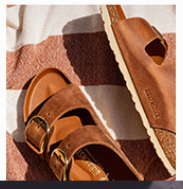

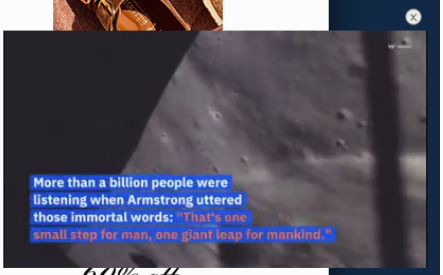

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Wu Mingren ('Dhwty') has a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient History and Archaeology. Although his primary interest is in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, he is also interested in other geographical regions, as well as other time periods.... **Read More**

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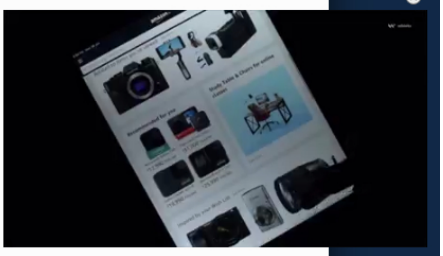

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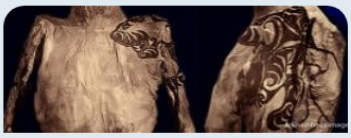

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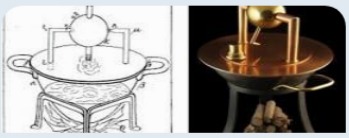

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At Ancient Origins, we believe that one of the most important fields of knowledge we can pursue as human beings is our beginnings. And while some people may seem content with the story as it stands, our view is that there exist countless mysteries, scientific anomalies and surprising artifacts that have yet to be discovered and explained.

The goal of Ancient Origins is to highlight recent archaeological discoveries, peer-reviewed academic research and evidence, as well as offering alternative viewpoints and explanations of science, archaeology, mythology, religion and history around the globe.

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By bringing together top experts and authors, this archaeology website explores lost civilizations, examines sacred writings, tours ancient places, investigates ancient discoveries and questions mysterious happenings. Our open community is dedicated to digging into the origins of our species on planet earth, and question wherever the discoveries might take us. We seek to retell the story of our beginnings.

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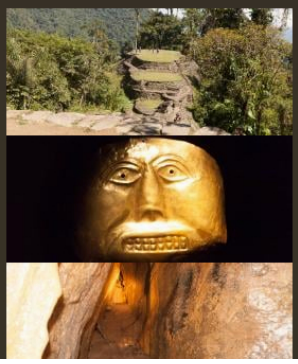

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UPDATED 3 AUGUST, 2019 - 22:57 SARAH P YOUNG

Nine Parts of the Human Soul According to the Ancient Egyptians

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The idea of the human soul has fascinated humankind for thousands of years. Cultures around the world have sought to explain the soul or spirit in a wide and fascinating variety of ways.

The soul is often an important aspect of religion and is closely tied to the **afterlife**, **reincarnation**, and **spiritual realms** . This means the concept of the soul is integral to many belief systems and that in many cases the descriptions and explanations of the soul are lengthy and complex.

For the **religious** and **non-religious** alike the soul remains a **symbol** of self, and the idea of wagering or losing one's soul has been used as a plotline in stories such as *Faustus* for generations. In some cultures, such as **head-hunting** tribes in Indonesia, taking the part of the body believed to house the soul from an enemy is the greatest prize – simultaneously denying their foe the chance to move on to an afterlife and stealing the power of the soul to strengthen their own tribe or family.

Ancient Egyptians had their own complex ideas about what makes up the human soul, and their beliefs involved dividing the soul into nine parts: Khat, Ba, Ren, Ka, Shuyet, Jb, Akh, Sahu, and Sechem.

Eight of these were immortal and passed into the **afterlife** and the ninth was the physical body which was left behind. The parts all had their own unique functions, and by analyzing these it is possible to understand more about what the ancient Egyptians believed.

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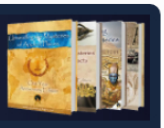

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Khat or Kha – The Body

Ancient Egyptians believed the physical form itself was a part of the human soul and called this element the Khat or Kha. It was the vessel inhabited by the rest of the soul on **Earth**. This is part of the reason **mummification** became so important to ancient Egyptians – preserving the physical body was actually preserving an important part of the soul.

After a person had died, offerings would still be made to the soul at their physical body because it was believed the rest of their soul could supernaturally absorb the benefits and nutrients from the offerings. The body was a link to the essence of the person who had once inhabited it – a concept which is seen in many other interpretations of the soul.

Ba – The Personality

The Ba is perhaps the closest the ancient Egyptians had to the modern ideas about the soul. It made up all the elements of a person that made them unique.

Taking the form of a bird with a human head, the Ba was the way the soul could move between the **mortal realm** and the spiritual one. The Egyptians believed the Ba still traveled between both realms occasionally while a person was still alive, but that the journey the Ba made between worlds increased significantly after death.

*Ba, part of the human soul, in a facsimile of a vignette from the Book of the Dead. (A. Parrot / **Public Domain**)*

The Ba would visit the gods and the **spiritual realm** , but it was this part of the soul which would also frequent the places a person loved when they were still alive, maintaining a link between the parts of the soul which dwelled among the stars and the Khat and other elements of the soul which had remained on Earth.

The idea that the Ba would spend time in places a person loved during life is also similar to some modern ideas about **ghosts** and spirits lingering at a place once loved by a particular person when they were alive. The Ba was also believed to be connected physically to the body and it would remain with the Khat when it was not visiting other physical places or **communing with the gods** .

Ren – The True Name

Ancient Egyptians were given a name at birth which was kept secret to everyone but the gods. This name was considered an extremely important and powerful part of the soul with the ability to destroy a person and their soul permanently.

Throughout life, an individual was known only by a nickname so that no one would be able to learn their true Ren and gain the powers it contained, or the chance and knowledge needed to destroy it.

As long as the Ren still existed, a soul had the power to keep on surviving. As long as embalming was correctly completed and mummification was successful, the Ren meant a person and their soul would exist for eternity.

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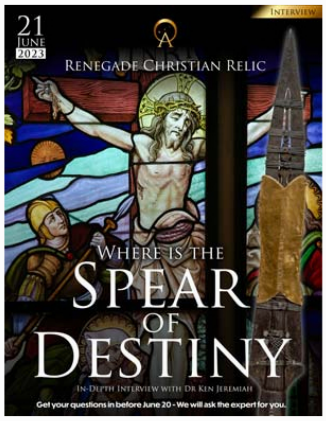

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*As long as the Ren existed, the human soul survived. (Jacktandy000 / **CC BY-SA 4.0**)*

A series of texts beginning around 350 AD called the *Book of Breathings* compiled the names of ancient Egyptians and wrote them down physically to try and ensure they survived. The power of the name was acknowledged by the creation of the cartouche – a special way of writing a name inside a protective magical barrier – which was used around royal names.

Just as preserving the name, the Ren was crucial to preserve the soul. Destroying the Ren was a way of making sure a soul was destroyed forever. This is part of the reason some names of hated figures such as Akhenaten were ritually and destructively removed from monuments and texts after their death.

Ka – The Vital Essence

The Ka was the vital essence of a person which distinguished between life and death. The Egyptians believed that either the fertility goddess Heqet or the goddess of childbirth Meskhenet breathed the Ka into a body at the time of birth. The Ka is what made the new infant truly alive.

They believed the Ka was sustained throughout life through food and drink. They believed the Ka still needed nourishment after death, which is the reason food and drink would be presented to the Khat. They did not think the Ka still needed to eat the food physically, but thought the nutrients were absorbed by the Ka in a supernatural manner after death.

A kind of offering tray called a Soul House which was made of clay shaped into a house was developed to present the Ka with offerings. Some surviving examples even have clay models of food in them, and they have been used as a way of determining what an average house would have looked like in ancient Egypt.

*A Soul House.. (Geni / **CC BY-SA 4.0**)*

Some people believe Soul Houses were even intended as a physical place for the Ka to reside, though there is no evidence of this, and it is more likely they were simply an elaborate way of presenting offerings of food and drink to the deceased.

Shuyet – The Shadow

Ancient Egyptians believed the shadow was actually a part of a person's soul. It was ever present, and they believed it contained a part of what makes each individual unique.

As in many other cultures, the Egyptians also believed the shadow was linked in some way to death. The Shuyet was believed to be a servant to **Anubis**, the Egyptian god of death and the **afterlife**. Physical depictions of the Shuyet were of a human figure shaded entirely black.

Anubis was the ancient Egyptian god associated with mummification and burial rituals, here he

*attends to a mummy. (Jeff Dahl / **Public Domain**)*

Some people had a 'Shadow Box' among their funerary items so that the Shuyet had a place to inhabit. In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* the soul is described as leaving the tomb of the deceased during the day in the form of a shadow. This Shuyet is considered only a shadow of the person it represents and not a major or destructive manifestation of the deceased in the physical realm.

Jb – The Heart

Just as many people still believe today, the Ancient Egyptians saw the heart as the home of human emotion. It was also considered the center of thought, will, and intention. This meant the Jb (heart) was a very important part of the soul for them, and the word appears in many sayings and expressions in ancient Egyptian writings. While English expressions often refer to the heart as a metaphor, in ancient Egyptians sayings, mentioning the heart is referring to the physical heart.

As an element of the soul, the Jb was the part a person used to gain access to the afterlife. The heart would be **weighed on a scale** against a feather – the feather of truth – and if the heart weighed more than the feather, a person was denied access to the afterlife and their heart was eaten by a demon called Ammit who was described as a fearsome lion-hippo-crocodile hybrid.

*Weighing of the heart, the Jb of the human soul. (ISa1 / **Public Domain**)*

To preserve and protect the Jb the heart would be specially embalmed, and then placed with the rest of the body along with a heart scarab which was a magical amulet intended to prevent the heart giving away too much information about a person and jeopardizing their success in passing the weighing of the heart.

Akh or Ikhu – The Immortal Self

The Akh was a magical combination of the elements Ba and Ka which represented the enlightened immortal being after death. This magical unification of Ba and Ka would only be possible if the correct funerary rites were performed after death.

The Akh did not stay with the Khat as many other elements of the soul did, it lived among the stars with the gods, though it did return to the body on occasion if necessary. It was a representation of the intellect, will, and intentions of a person.

The Akh was also the aspect of the soul which could reconnect through loved ones by appearing to them in their dreams.

Sahu – The Judge and Spiritual Body

The Sahu was actually a further aspect of the Akh. As soon as a **soul** had been deemed worthy of entering the afterlife, the Sahu would separate from all other forms of the soul. Much like some modern ideas about ghosts, the Sahu was said to haunt those who had wronged a person in life and protect those who the soul had loved. Just as the Akh could appear in a person's dreams, the Sahu could appear to a person.

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*Ancient Egypt literature included hauntings by the Sahu, the 'ghost' part of the human soul. (SteinsplitterBot / **Public Domain**)*

It was often considered a vengeful spirit and could be blamed for any ill fortunes. There is even an example from the Middle Kingdom of a letter left by a widower in the tomb of his late wife begging her Sahu to stop haunting him.

Sechem or Sekhem – Life Energy

The Sekhem was another element of the Akh. Not much is known about the Sekhem, but it was considered a kind of life energy of the soul. The Sekhem was present in the afterlife after judgement had been passed and the soul was considered worthy.

In the ***Book of the Dead*** the Sekhem is described as a power and the place in which the gods **Horus** and **Osiris** live in the underworld.

*Sheet from a Book of the Dead. (Alonso de Mendoza / **Public Domain**)*

The Sekhem may also have been used to control the physical surroundings and outcomes of a person and their actions. Like the Akh, the Sekhem did not reside with the Khat and the physical body, but among the stars with the gods and goddesses.

The Complexity of the Soul

The way ancient Egyptians divided the soul is indicative of how important it was to them. It was clearly something which had been thought about in a tremendous amount of detail, and it was the crux of their beliefs about the afterlife and how a person could reach it.

Their beliefs about the soul also dictated the way they treated a body after death. Mummification, an iconic part of ancient **Egyptian culture** , was a result of their beliefs about the Khat and other parts of the soul needing a place to live.

The nine aspects of the soul have influenced many other parts of Egyptian culture too. From the violent removal of names to destroy the Ren to the creation of texts such as the *Book of the Dead* , the soul was pivotal to much of the **culture** and **society** of ancient Egypt.

Without this complicated belief system many of the artifacts which have become iconic and world-renowned elements of ancient Egyptian culture would not have been developed, and the fascinating world which has captured many a modern imagination may have left very different treasures behind.

*Top image: Egyptian mummy. Credit: **markrhhiggins** / Adobe Stock*

By **Sarah P Young**

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SARAH P

Sarah P Young is undertaking her masters in archaeology, specializing in early human behavior and in particular evidence of interaction between humans and Neanderthals. She hopes to continue her studies further and complete a doctorate.

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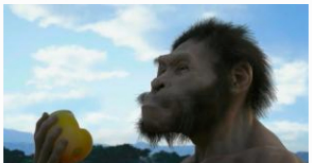

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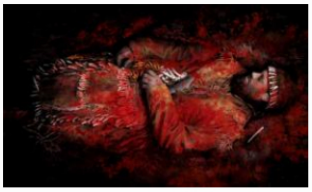

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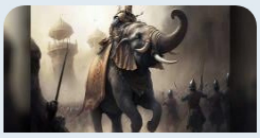

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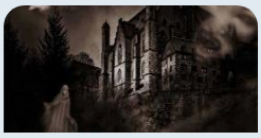

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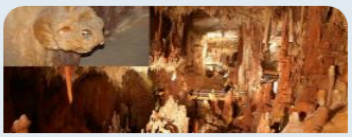

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At Ancient Origins, we believe that one of the most important fields of knowledge we can pursue as human beings is our beginnings. And while some people may seem content with the story as it stands, our view is that there exist countless mysteries, scientific anomalies and surprising artifacts that have yet to be discovered and explained.

The goal of Ancient Origins is to highlight recent archaeological discoveries, peer-reviewed academic research and evidence, as well as offering alternative viewpoints and explanations of science, archaeology, mythology, religion and history around the globe.

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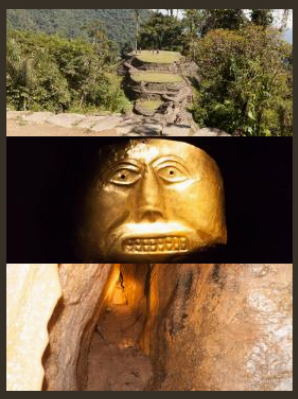

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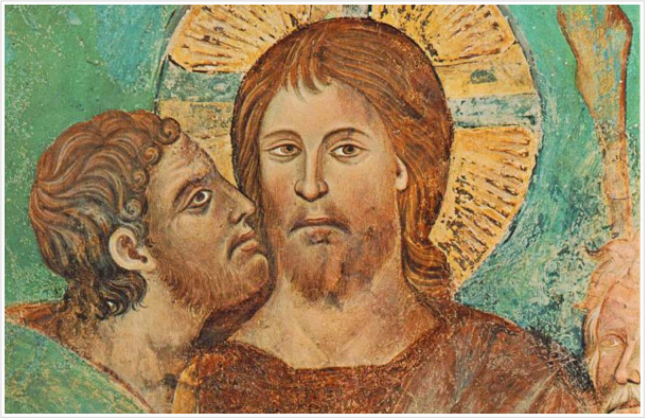

UPDATED 16 DECEMBER, 2021 - 17:22 APRILHOLLOWAY

The Ancient Text That Describes Jesus as a Shapeshifter

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It was in March 2013 when reports flooded the headlines about a newly deciphered Egyptian text, dating back almost 1,200 years, which controversially described Jesus as having the ability to change shape. But just as quickly as the story made its way through major news sites around the world, it disappeared and has hardly been mentioned since. Why has the study and research surrounding this text faded into oblivion? Why has there been virtually no scholarly debate on the subject of Jesus as a shapeshifter?

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*The Coptic text was found in 1910 and purchased by J. P. Morgan in 1911. It contains a controversial description of Jesus as a shapeshifter. (**The Pierpont Morgan Library**)*

Judas Used a Kiss to Identify Jesus the Shapeshifter, Claims Coptic Text

Written in the **Coptic** language, the ancient text written in the name of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, a distinguished theologian who lived during the fourth century, tells part of the **crucifixion** story of **Jesus** with apocryphal plot twists, some of which have never been seen before. They have been revealed thanks to a translation carried out by Roelof Van den Broek of Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and published in the book *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem On the Life and the Passion of Christ: A Coptic Apocryphon* .

- **Evolving Forms: An Intriguing Look at Shapeshifting**
- **'Shape-shifter' Slaughtered in Sumatra in the Form of a Tiger!**

The ancient text explains why **Judas** used a kiss, specifically, to betray Jesus. According to the canonical bible, the apostle Judas betrays Jesus in exchange for money by using a **kiss** to identify him leading to Jesus' arrest. This apocryphal tale explains that the reason Judas used a kiss, specifically, is because Jesus had the ability to change shape.

Then the Jews said to Judas: How shall we arrest him [Jesus], for he does not have a single shape but his appearance changes. Sometimes he is ruddy, sometimes he is white, sometimes he is red, sometimes he is wheat colored, sometimes he is pallid like ascetics, sometimes he is a youth, sometimes an old man.

This leads Judas to suggest using a kiss as a means to identify him. If Judas had given the arresters a description of **Jesus** he could have changed shape. By kissing Jesus, Judas tells the people exactly who he is, **shapeshifter** or not.

*Fresco by Giotto di Bondone depicting the arrest of Christ and the kiss of Judas. (**Public domain**)*

The Idea of Jesus as a Shapeshifter is Old News

This understanding of Judas' kiss goes way back. According to Van den Broek, the explanation of Judas' kiss is first found in Origen, a theologian who lived between 185 and 254 AD. In his work, *Contra Celsum,* the ancient writer stated that "to those who saw him [Jesus] he did not appear alike to all." Nevertheless, Van den Broek is careful to note that he is not suggesting that Jesus was in fact a shapeshifter, but only that some people in early Christian times may have thought he was.

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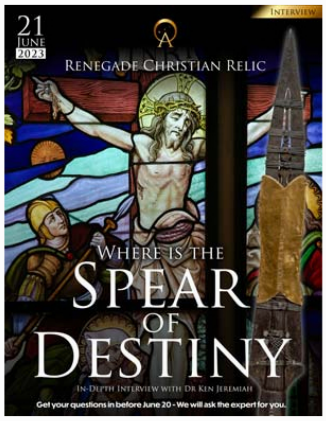

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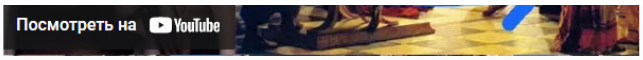

The text is one of 55 **Coptic manuscripts** that were found in 1910 by villagers digging for fertilizer at the site of the destroyed Monastery of Archangel Michael of the Desert near Al Hamuli in Egypt. Apparently, during the 10th century, monks had buried the monastery's manuscripts in a stone vat for safekeeping.

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The **monastery** ceased operations around the early 10th century, and the text was rediscovered in the spring of 1910. In December 1911, it was purchased, along with other texts, by American financier J. P. Morgan. His collections, and the text described, are now housed in the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City.

*The 1,200-year-old Coptic manuscript, which describes Jesus as a shapeshifter, incorporates this cross decoration within the manuscript. (**The Pierpont Morgan Library**)*

While headlines at the time of the announcement were quite sensationalist and described the text as containing **Christianity**-shattering information, the publishing scholar never claimed anything of the sort. It is also clear that the text is not a hoax but a genuine item published by a respected scholar and by a notable academic press (E. J. Brill). So why hasn't such a fascinating text led to further research, interpretations, or discussion among scholars as relating to **Jesus** as a **shapeshifter**?

*Top image: According to the ancient text, Judas used a kiss to identify Jesus due to his abilities as a shapeshifter. Source: **The Morgan Library & Museum***

By April Holloway

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COMMENTS (41 Comments)

APRIL

*April Holloway is a Co-Owner, Editor and Writer of Ancient Origins. For privacy reasons, she has previously written on Ancient Origins under the pen name April Holloway, but is now choosing to use her real name, **Joanna Gillan**.*

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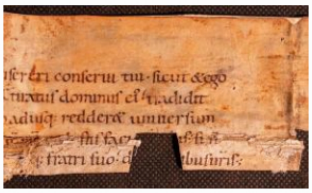

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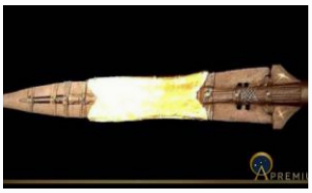

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Greek Mythology

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The Enigma of Cleopatra's Death: Was it Suicide or Murder?

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The Enigma of Cleopatra's Death: Was it Suicide or Murder?

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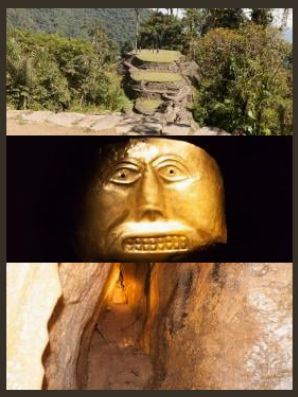

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Inside Mexico's Sonora Witches Market (Video)

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Mexican witchcraft has long been a topic of fascination for people around the world, and for good reason. In a bustling city of 20 million people, Mexico City, where the majority are devout Catholics, the Church vehemently denounces any association with **witchcraft**, branding it the **devil's work** . Yet, for many Mexicans, the allure of this ancient craft remains irresistible. Hidden within the labyrinthine corridors of the Sonora witches' market, an anthropologist named Anthony has witnessed

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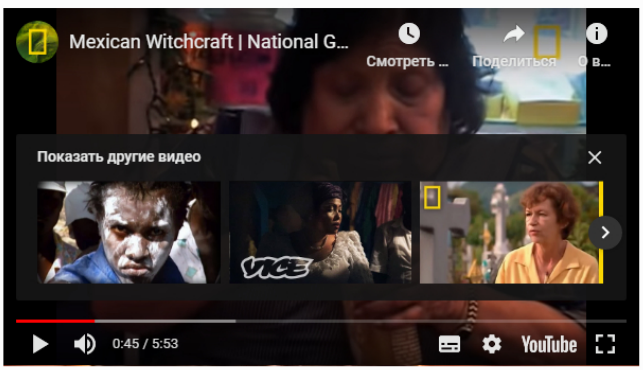

*Top image: Sonora witchcraft market, Mexico City. Source: **Belikova Oksana** / Adobe Stock.*

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By Robbie Mitchell

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ROBBIE

I'm a graduate of History and Literature from The University of Manchester in England and a total history geek. Since a young age, I've been obsessed with history. The weirder the better. I spend my days working as a freelance... **Read More**

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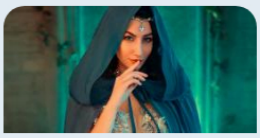

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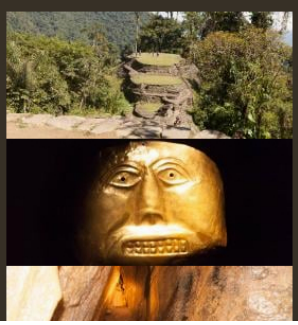

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Updated 10 February, 2019 - 18:35 Caleb Strom

Was Moloch really Ba'al, the Ancient God Who Demanded Child Sacrifice?

Moloch, or Molech, is well known in the Bible for being the god to whom child sacrifices appear to have been made in a shrine outside the city of Jerusalem. Although Moloch is well known in the Bible, he is less well-known in the archaeological and historical records leading to disagreements over the identity of the god as well as the exact nature of the cult of Moloch.

Origin of the Name

The name "Molech" or "Moloch" most likely comes from the Hebrew word *Melekh*, meaning king. For a long time, it was believed that Moloch was another name for Milcom, the chief deity of the Ammonites, but this view has fallen out of favor because of more recent research.
The name of Molech was most likely a title or epithet for a deity rather than an actual name. It is common in Phoenician and Canaanite inscriptions for deities to be referred to as king of something. Malkandros, another name for El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, for example, translates to "King of Man."

Moloch – followers sacrificed children to the idol. Source: Jonund / Public Domain .

Moloch and Ba’al-Hadad

One suggested identity for Molech is the Canaanite deity, Ba’al-Hadad or Hadad. Hadad was considered the king of the gods by the ancient Canaanites. Evidence that Moloch can be identified with him comes from the fact that the pagan alters in the valley of Ben-Hinnom where children were sacrificed are also described as altars to Ba’al by the prophet Jeremiah. Furthermore, Assyrian texts state that child sacrifices were made to Adad, the Assyrian equivalent of the Canaanite Hadad. This makes it reasonable to suggest that child sacrifices may have also been made to Hadad and that a cult of child sacrifice may have been related to him.

Hadad, God of Weather, Hurricanes, Storms, Thunder, and Rain - Assyrian soldiers carrying a statue of Adad. (Lindert / Public Domain)

Cult of Moloch

In the Biblical account, children are said to have been sacrificed or "passed through the fire" to Moloch at a shrine outside the city walls of Jerusalem called Topheth, in the valley of Ben-Hinnom. Although it is most likely that this practice was due to the introduction of a foreign deity, it has also been suggested that the Judahites believed that that they were making sacrifices to Yahweh, the national deity of the ancient Judahites and Israelites. Either way, the prophets harshly condemn this practice as being offensive to Yahweh whether it be a corruption of Yahweh worship or worship of a foreign deity such as Ba'al-Hadad.

The practice of child sacrifice is attested in other sources throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, particularly in Carthage. In the city, a sacred grove and a temple were dedicated to one such cult.

Moloch's sacrifice altar. (Archivist / Adobe)

Carthage was founded by Phoenician colonists which gives them a connection to the Canaanites. It has been suggested that there is also a connection between the child sacrifices practiced in Carthage and similar practices in Canaan and Judah such as the cult of Moloch.
Some scholars dispute this suggestion saying that the Carthaginian practices differed from the cult of Moloch. It is commonly believed that child sacrifice at Carthage was usually only done during times of extreme crisis, in accordance with Classical sources, whereas child sacrifice is said to have been a regular part of the cult of Moloch.

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On the other hand, it is isn't necessarily clear from the Biblical text that child sacrifice was as regular as it has been suggested in the cult of Moloch. The cult of Moloch may also have only involved sacrifice of children in times of crisis, or it may have occurred only on special occasions such as annual festivals or at the

birth of a first-born child. These practices are attested in other parts of the ancient Mediterranean. As a result, there isn't necessarily a reason to think that one cult involved regular sacrifices while the other one did not.

Child Sacrifice or Initiation?

Another major point of contention in the study of Moloch is whether or not children were sacrificed at all. Some scholars as well as ancient Rabbis have suggested that "pass through the fire" meant passing between rows of fire in an initiation rite. In this view, the "abomination of Moloch" condemned by the Hebrew prophets was Jewish children being initiated into paganism. Thus, children were not actually sacrificed at all and it was the initiation ceremony that alarmed the prophets.

There are some problems with this view, however. Although there are some cases where the text could be referring to something like this initiation rite, there are also cases where passing through fire is clearly referring to burning. Furthermore, ancient Near Eastern texts give good reason to believe that actual child sacrifice occurred.

Uncertainty Remains

There is a lot of uncertainty regarding Moloch, though a few things can be said with relative confidence. It is clear from Biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources that Moloch was probably a title or epithet used for a prominent Canaanite deity to whom children were at least occasionally sacrificed. This deity was either a foreign deity or he may have been a mischaracterization of Yahweh himself, though this is one of the less likely explanations. Beyond this, there is still much to learn.

Top image: Statue of the god Moloch, Turin Cinema Museum. (Stella / CC BY-SA 4.0)

By Caleb Strom

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you know that the symbol was influenced by "The Goat Of Mendes" from Egypt?

Levi was already influenced by the Occult Sciences disclosed by melanated geniuses in Egypt's Priesthoods. Do you believe he chose a goat as his "magical" symbol by chance? Although technically the "Goat of Mendes" was a Ram (and it was NOT evil), you can see where Baphomet's idea came from. Not only that, but the Baphomet emblem, in its purest esoteric essence, represents the completed 'hue-man' – the original melanated man and woman with knowledge of self.

Legend Of Medusa: Story Of European Fear Of Black Women With Spiritual Power, Like The Sibyls

Although extremist caucazoid satanists and religious zealots have stolen the symbol and notion of Baphomet and converted it into "The Devil," the diligent student of life sciences will not be misled or disheartened by such foolishness. Because the real curious melanated mind understands the physics of polarity, it is unaffected by the subjective pendulum swing of good and evil. With that understanding, you may lift the veil and see the image's coded symbolism without being overwhelmed by fear of the unknown.

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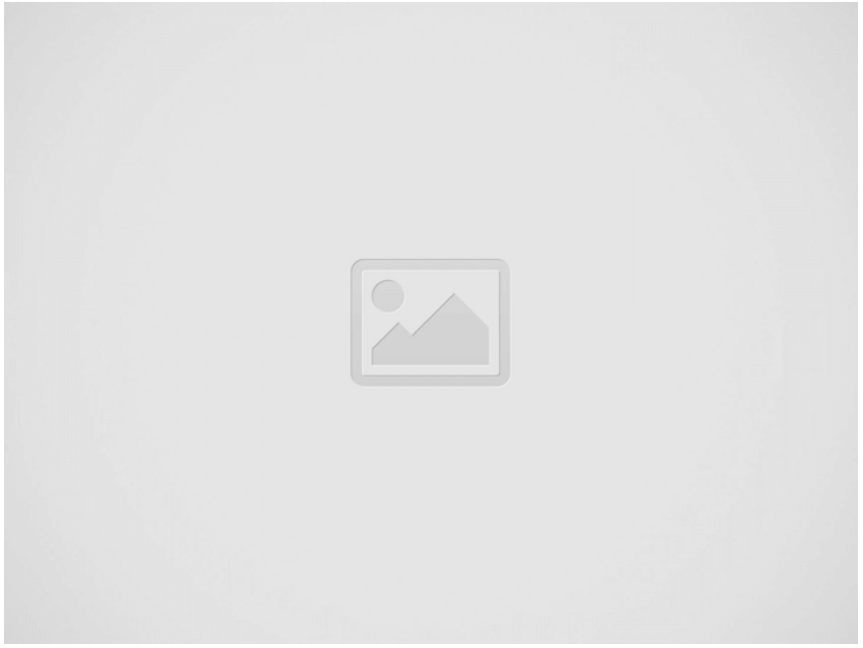

The Biggest Disaster Of Colonialism Remains The Image of God Africans Now See

The Aggressive Emasculation of the Negro Man: The Latest Assault On Our Race

Banebdjedet (Banedbdjed) was an Ancient Egyptian ram god with a cult centre at Mendes.

According to Ancient Egypt Online, because Osiris was the ancient Egyptian lord of the

to the belief that Osiris' backbone was the Djed pillar (which represented stability). This provides an intriguing glimpse into the ancient Egyptian understanding of death. They feared death, but they saw the stability and harmony inherent in the cycle of decay and rebirth.

Africans Are BLACK People – Never Let Caucasian Definitions Influence Your Understanding Of Who You Are

The Ba of a person was not their soul, but their essence (strength, efficacy, renown, or charm), and the Ba was represented by the hieroglyph for a "ram." As a result, Banebdjed was portrayed as a ram or ram-headed man, and a living "holy ram" (considered to embody the god's spirit) was worshiped in Djedet (near Osiris' cult center at Djedu). The rams were mummified and buried in their own necropolis with all the pomp and ceremony befitting a Pharaoh.

Are White Supremacists Trying To Provoke Blacks Into A Race War In The United States?

During the late period, Greeks mispronounced the word Ba-neb-Djetet ('Ram Lord of Djedet') and named the city Mendes, referring to Banebdjed as "the goat of Mendes." Some esoteric academics have linked "the goat of Mendes" to Baphomet (the "false god" the Templars were accused of worshiping), while others have converted it into a diabolical cliché. The only issue with this is that Banebdjedt was a ram, not a goat, and

he (or she) was not regarded malevolent or even hostile.

Occultist Eliphas Levi created the figure of Baphomet in 1854 for his book “Dogme et

“The goat on the frontispiece carries the sign of the pentagram on the forehead, with one point at the top, a symbol of light, his two hands forming the sign of hermetism, the one pointing up to the white moon of Chesed, the other pointing down to the black moon of Geburah,” explains Eliphas Levi. This symbol represents the ideal balance of mercy and justice. His one arm is feminine, the other male, like the androgyn of Khunrath, whose attributes we had to combine with those of our goat because he is the same sign. The intelligent flame flashing between his horns symbolizes the cosmic balance’s magical light, the image of the soul exalted beyond matter, just as the flame, while bound to matter, shines above it. Because the soul is insensitive by nature and can only suffer when it materializes, the beast’s head represents the horror of the sinner, whose materially acting, totally accountable component must endure the penalty exclusively. The rod standing in place of the genitals represents eternal life, the body coated in scales represents water, the semi-circle above it represents the atmosphere, and the feathers following above the volatile. The two breasts and androgynous arms of this occult sciences sphinx symbolise humanity.”

Racism: America Now One Of The Most Unsafe Countries For Blacks In The World

Africa’s Continued Exploitation By The West And The Powerlessness Of The Black Man In The Face Of An Unjust UN

OCCULT SCIENCE VS. SATANISM

OCCULT SCIENCE VS. SATANISM

One thing is certain: the esoteric sciences disclosed by ancient melanated minds have nothing to do with satanism. The Egyptian priesthood did not worship Satan. This

persona and magical references may terrify the normal individual, but the inquiring Melanated Mind with knowledge of self knows that this is a sham.

Worshiping Satan is as absurd as worshiping Jesus. Becoming a magician, occultist, or alchemist is all about understanding your inner power. True occultists would never advise you to delegate your power to an entity other than yourself. So keep that in mind when you explore the Universe of Occult Knowledge. We are attempting to evolve our own situation via knowledge of self and the Universe, rather than being too focused on one side of the pendulum.

BLACKNESS, MAGIC, OCCULT SCIENCE AND THE MELANATED MIND

Every major religion and school of philosophical or metaphysical thinking has been founded on the science developed and disclosed by ancient Melanated Minds, particularly in the Egyptian priesthoods.

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What exactly is occult science? The term Occult originally meant “hidden, concealed, secret,” whereas Science refers to structured knowledge.

A general definition of “Occult Science” for the purposes of this book is as follows:

Accumulated and classified knowledge of the invisible forces and processes that regulate reality in the mind, nature, and the Universe.

Occult studies include the highest circumstance of the mind, magnetism, electricity, astrology, anatomy, alchemy, universal laws, and so on. Essentially, it is the science of the self and the Universe from the inside out. Because most people are content with

immense disaster.

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Anyone who has this great Knowledge of Self and the Universe has access to higher realms of consciousness, allowing the adept to act as a True and Living God.

Unfortunately, many of the old texts containing this information have been destroyed or taken by the Caucazoid, who poses as the inventor of supreme wisdom. Many people still mistakenly attribute the development of the “higher sciences” to Caucasian Greeks. “The Greeks were not the inventors of Greek Philosophy,” stated George G.M James, “but the inhabitants of North Africa, popularly known as the Egyptians were.” Nothing was discovered by Greek philosophers; everything was stolen from the Egyptians.

Another thing to consider is that wherever supreme wonders are located on planet Earth in the form of an old understanding of complicated science reflected in

discovering art, literature, or building, the likeness of Black (melanated) people can be found. From the exquisite Olmec Heads in Mexico to the huge portrayals of Buddhas with negro characteristics inscribed in the mountains of Cambodia, and the infinite depictions of Black people in Egyptian art and sculpture, there is no end to the

right? Because their "intellectual contributions" were so profound, why aren't the Greeks inscribed in stone around the world in gigantic monuments to be remembered and venerated forever? Apparently, the "good stuff" is always located where melanated people are, and what they dig up in Greece is insufficient to satisfy intellectual interests.

If you read the great Occult texts published by the Caucazoid (Transcendental Magic by Eliphas Levi), you will understand what I mean.

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Giuliano Kremmerz's The Hermetic Science of Transformation, for example. They will repeatedly pay homage to Hermes Trismegistus and the "supreme universal wisdom he endowed to the world," but they will rarely mention that Hermes is nothing more than a Greek version of the Egyptian diety Tehuti (Thoth), which was actually a supreme priesthood of Melanated Minds rather than a single man. Some texts, such as Thomas H. Burgoyne's The Light of Egypt, state unequivocally that all esoteric, philosophical, and occult science was developed and revealed by ancient Melanated

Minds.

Despite those who seek to conceal or destroy ancient knowledge's desperate efforts, enough information has "slipped through the cracks" to provide a Curious Melanated

sufficient to assist any earnest student fill in the blanks.

Many of the Occult publications available to us at this time contain fractured truths, and much worse, the Caucazoid's limited non-melanated worldview. Invading invaders destroyed or stole much of the greatest wisdom known to adepts and taught to initiates of the ancient Egyptian Mystery Systems. Unfortunately, the true researcher must sift through stacks of available Occult books, many of which are now written by non-melanated peoples, compare those findings to our pre-existing Knowledge of Self and the Universe, and extrapolate the gold from their rendition of our ancestor's universal sciences. Because of archeological robberies of ancient writings and artifacts, they have had considerably more access to stolen occult information than melanated peoples during this time period, yet they are unable to fully employ the knowledge they discover and write about owing to their biological predicament. Without enough levels of Melanin, it is nearly impossible to communicate with nature and energies on a supreme level. The potential to create "magical" phenomena is a fairy tale for the non-melanated mutant who dares to strut arrogantly while carrying our ancestors' great knowledge. Meanwhile, the Melanated Mind's potential to create

“magical” events is a normal occurrence.

Pay close attention. Why do you think most occult literature published by non-

non-melanated “magician” lacks the biological circumstances to consciously connect with the cosmos’ dark matter in a fruitful way. As a result, blackness becomes an uncontrollable, unfathomable, unreachable, never-ending tsunami of doom that is always coming to overwhelm non-melanated peoples. In contrast, melanated beings are empowered not only by the energy of the sun (the light), but also by the limitless blackness. The Melanated Mind moves through the infinitely expanding Universe’s blackness (dark matter) like a fish in the sea.

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This is why it is critical to regain the supreme esoteric sciences discovered and revealed by our forefathers. Another motive for writing this book is to encourage people of color to take ownership of the sciences that our forefathers left behind. If we improve ourselves to fully represent our supreme circumstance, our science and spirituality become our technology. With Knowledge of Self and the Universe, the evolved Melanated Mind can act as a True and Living God, manipulating atoms and energies through mental conception or spiritual alchemy to achieve a desired result in physical reality.

physical reality.

Melanin's quantum actuality – the black, transmutable, life-giving, multi-dimensional, super conductive substance of the Universe – can only be properly comprehended

"The Black Dot is an ancient sign for blackness; it is the black seed of all mankind, the archetype of humanity, the secret doorway to the collective unconsciousness-darkness, the shadow, the primeval ocean, chaos, the womb, and the doorway to life." This ancient symbol for blackness was the topic of 300 thousand years of serious scientific inquiry by profound ancient scientists who were themselves black in consciousness. A long line of very bright scientists investigated their own essence and discovered a hidden portal to their souls and spirits, as well as a doorway to advanced rules and rhythms that span the Universe. They discovered universal rules based in the black seed that nourished all dimensions of time and space. These first titans discovered that all life arose from a black seed, that all life was based in blackness, and that all creatures carried a memory of their collective forebears. The one truth from which life's weave spun was blackness, the universal solvent of everything. All hues and vibratory energies were merely shades of black. The color black was found in the night sky, primordial ocean, outer space, the birthplace and womb of the planets, stars, and galaxies of the Universe; black holes were discovered at the center of our own galaxy and many other galaxies. Carbon, the essential atom found in all biological

matter, was the color Black. Carbon atoms joined to form Black Melanin, the first molecule capable of capturing light and reproducing itself. Black Neuromelanin was discovered to be the chemical key to life and the brain itself. Pineal blood was discovered to be dependent on inner vision, intuition, creative genius, and spiritual

If Black people are the “Original” humans, the archetype of humanity, then Melanated Minds are at the root of everything: “agriculture, animal breeding, architecture, art, astronomy, business and trade, cash and currency, ceramics, clothing, dance, economics, healthcare, housing, jewelry, mail, mathematics, medicine, metalworking, mining, music, pottery, science, shoes, spoken language, sports, technology, and written language.”

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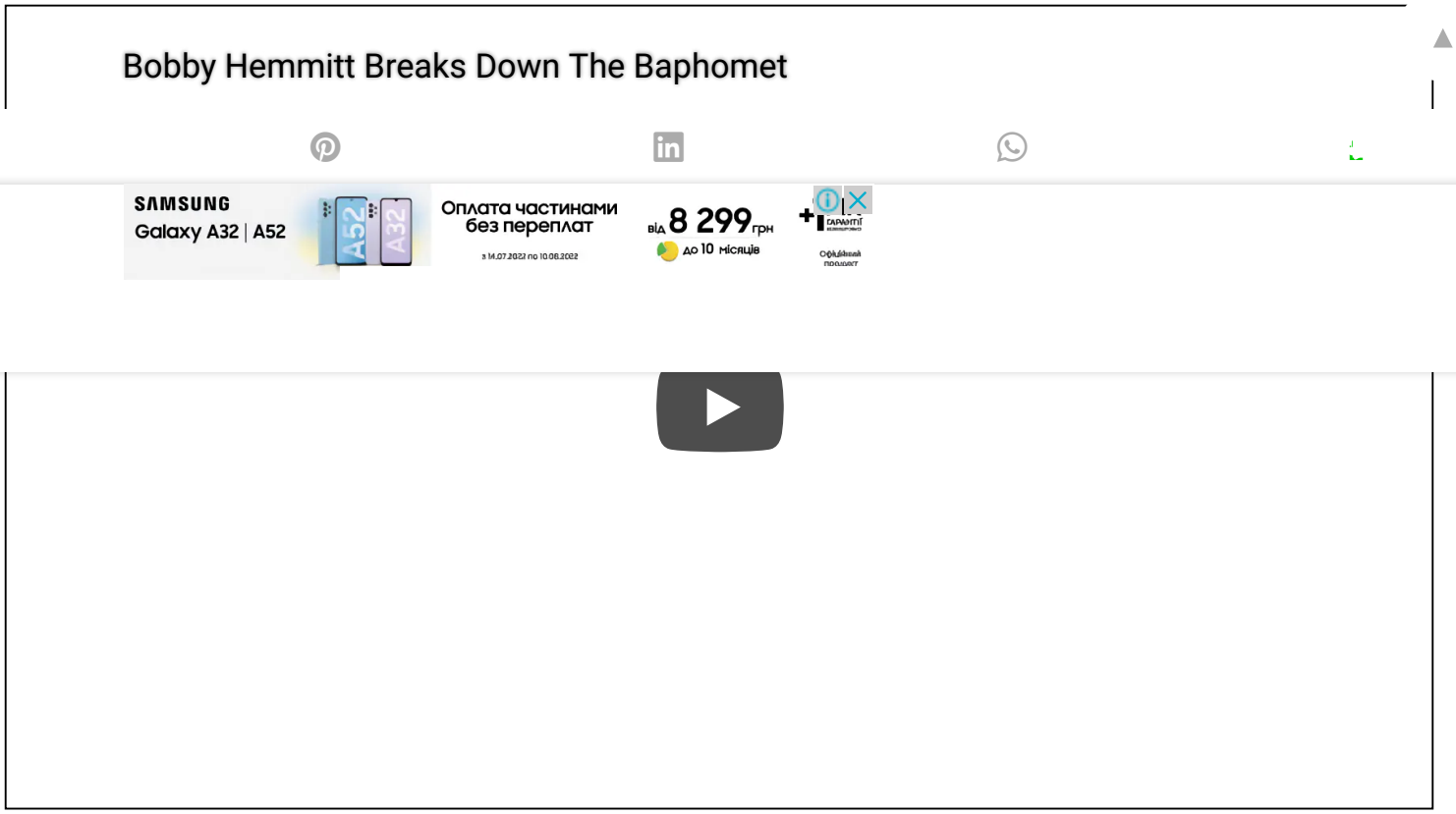
Our nature is to be top creators, which is why we are the foundation of all that is brilliant and creative. Melanated peoples are biologically equipped to produce “magical” phenomena – the ability to consciously manipulate atoms and energies of the Universe at will using mental force, conceptions, and/or spiritual alchemy – and with the active use of occult science (knowledge of the seen and unseen forces and processes that influence the Universe and everything in it) passed down from our forefathers, melanated peoples have the potential to evolve into something even greater.



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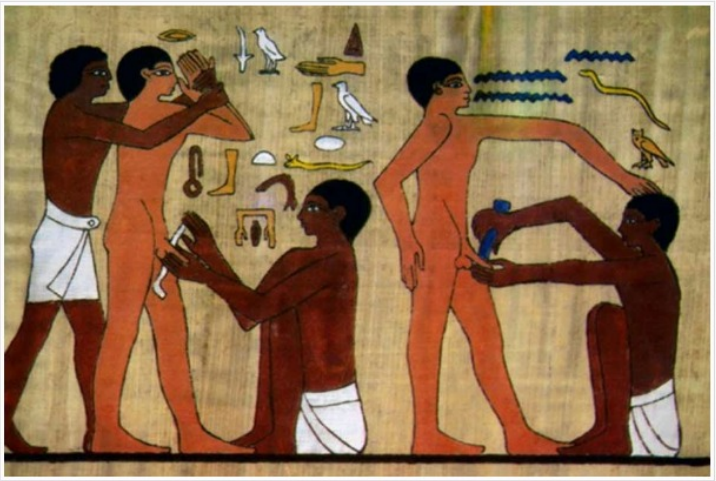

UPDATED 19 JULY, 2018 - 18:52 CALEB STROM

The Cutting Truth about Circumcision: It Was All About Rites and Religion

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When was circumcision first practiced? How did it evolve? Why was it practiced? The earliest literary evidence of the practice of circumcision goes back to ancient Egypt.

There are many hypotheses regarding the roots of the practice. Early Western scholars attributed the origins of circumcision to ancient Egypt. But many scholars today believe that the origin of the practice, as it is done in the West and the Middle East, goes back farther and originates with the inhabitants of southern Arabia and parts of Africa. Over the millennia, circumcision has been most often used as a religious rite, a rite of passage into manhood, but also as a form of punishment in wartime.

A Little or a Lot

Circumcision has been practiced in parts of Africa, Oceania, Judaism, and Islam. The form of circumcision that westerners are most familiar with is complete removal of the foreskin or prepuce, as it is practiced in Judaism.

However, in ancient Egypt and other cultures in Africa, only part of the foreskin was removed. In the Pacific islands, the frenum was snipped but the foreskin was left unmodified. This is interesting considering a Biblical reference where Yahweh commands the Israelites to circumcise their children again, "a second time" (Joshua 5:2). This could imply that some of them had already been circumcised the Egyptian way and had to be circumcised the Jewish or Israelite way.

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Circumcision in Egypt and Israel

In ancient Egypt, circumcision had a rather different function and process than it did in ancient Israel. In ancient Israel, circumcision was taken as a sign of membership in the covenant community established between God and Abraham. It was an ethnic marker showing that they

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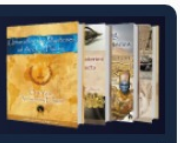

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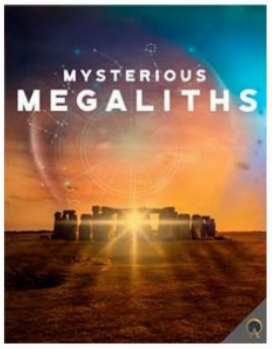

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were a part of the Israelite nation.

*"Isaac's Circumcision." (**Public Domain**)*

Although it could be performed on adults if needed, it was usually performed on infants, eight days after birth, like among modern Jews. An adult was usually only circumcised if a non-Israelite decided that he wanted to be inducted into the Israelite community. Later, when the Israelite religion become more organized, becoming ancient Judaism, converts to Judaism were required to undergo circumcision. One way that early Christianity first distinguished itself from Judaism was that non-Jewish Christians were not required to be circumcised.

In Egypt, it was typically done on adolescent men who were about to be initiated into the priesthood or as adult males of the noble class. It is not clear that this is the case from archaeological and historical records, but Egyptian circumcision may also have been used to demarcate a special elite class. Egyptian circumcision is depicted on temple walls where young men are seen being restrained as a priest performs the circumcision with a knife.

*Ancient Egyptian carved scene of circumcision, from the inner northern wall of the Temple of Khonspekhrod at the Precinct of Mut, Temple of Karnak, Luxor, Egypt. Eighteenth dynasty, Amenhotep III, c. 1360 BC. (Lasse Jensen/ **CC BY 2.5**)*

The Practice in Other African Cultures

Egypt is not the only African culture that practiced or practices circumcision. It is common among east African peoples and the Bantu, usually as a rite of passage into manhood. Young males of the Xhosa and Zulu ethnic groups traditionally had an elaborate circumcision ritual where their bodies would be painted with whitewash before their circumcision.

During the process, they would be isolated from the community for several weeks, especially from women. After the circumcision, they would abandon their cut foreskin in the forest, a symbol of them leaving behind their boyhood lives to become men, and then wash the whitewash off in a river. Circumcision is still regularly practiced among these cultures, but usually in hospitals instead of the traditional way.

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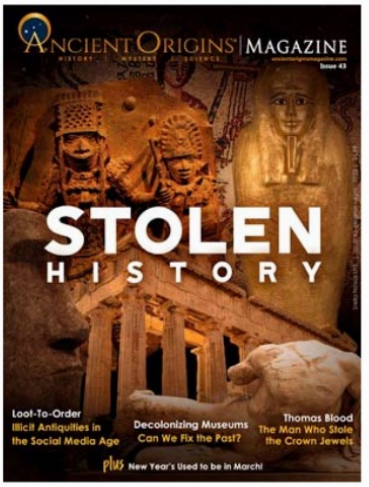

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*Zulu man performing traditional warrior dance. (Emmuhl/ **CC BY SA 3.0**)*

Circumcision in Oceania

Circumcision historically was not limited to only Africa and the Middle East. A form of circumcision was also practiced in Oceania and Aboriginal Australia using sea shells as the cutting instrument. Circumcision in Oceania and Australia was a rite of passage into manhood as well as a test of bravery.

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Wartime

Circumcision is not only used as a rite of passage to manhood or for religious reasons. It has also been used to punish enemy soldiers. There have been cases where soldiers captured in battle would be circumcised, especially in the Middle East, east Africa, and south Asia.

Historical Impact

Circumcision was once a rare custom, and most cultures outside of Africa, the Middle East, and Oceania did not originally practice it. It nonetheless has had a significant influence on the history of civilization, especially since one of the pillars of western civilization, ancient Israel, made it an ethnic marker for being an Israelite.

Today, the practice still continues with an estimated one-third of males worldwide being circumcised. It is most common among Muslims and Jews, for religious reasons, but it is also widespread in the United States, where it is implemented for prevention of health conditions, though many of the world's major medical organizations do not agree that there is any significant benefit which justifies the risks.

Circumcision is becoming increasingly controversial due to concerns about lack of informed consent and infringement of human rights.

*"Customs of Central Asians. Circumcision." "Photograph shows a group of men seated on the ground near a small boy who is being circumcised." (**Public Domain**)*

*Top Image: Ancient Egyptian men undergoing circumcision. Source: archivohistoria/ **CC BY 4.0***

By **Caleb Strom**

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CALEB

Caleb Strom is currently a graduate student studying planetary science. He considers himself a writer, scientist, and all-around story teller. His interests include planetary geology, astrobiology, paleontology, archaeology, history, space archaeology, and SETI.

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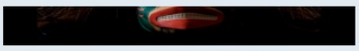

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At Ancient Origins, we believe that one of the most important fields of knowledge we can pursue as human beings is our beginnings. And while some people may seem content with the story as it stands, our view is that there exist countless mysteries, scientific anomalies and surprising artifacts that have yet to be discovered and explained.

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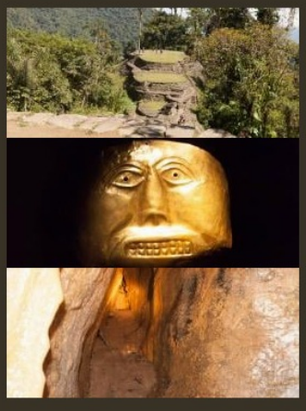

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The Dark Underworld of the Paris Catacombs

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Paris, the capital of France, is often called *La Ville Lumière* (meaning 'The City of Light'), however, beneath this bustling European city of 12 million people, lies a dark subterranean world holding the remains of 6 million of its former inhabitants. These are the Paris Catacombs: a network of old caves, quarries and tunnels stretching hundreds of miles, and seemingly lined with the bones of the dead.

Some areas are open to the public as museums, but since 1955 entrance to the majority of the underground space is prohibited. However this hasn't stopped some thrill-seekers venturing into the cavernous passages that have been home to thousands of upon thousands of bones of the dead. As the water table has risen under the city, many of these spaces are now filled with cool and clean water. Locals are well aware of this, and, **according to Bobrtimes** , this year's long, sweltering summer has seen an increase in illegal entrance to the catacombs as people seek a respite from the heat by using the subterranean pools as cooling zones.

But these desperate measures could have dire consequences. Just last month, two teenagers were rescued from the catacombs after being lost in the vast network for 3 days. They were found by rescue dogs and were taken to hospital to be treated for hypothermia, reported **The Guardian** . It was not known exactly how the boys got lost, but this occurence, along with the recent Thai cave emergency rescue, highlights just how easy it can be to get lost or cut off in such environments.

The historic underground catacombs are the final resting place of millions of Parisians. SBoyd/ ***Flickr***

Origins of the Paris Catacombs

The Paris Catacombs have their origins in the limestone quarries situated on the outskirts of the city. This natural resource has been in use since the time of the Romans, and provided construction material for the city's buildings, as well as contributed to the city's growth and expansion. It was only after during the second half of the 18 th century, however, that the former limestone mines (now under the city as it expanded over the centuries) were transformed into burial places.

By the 18 th century, Parisian cemeteries such as *Les Innocents* (the largest cemetery in Paris) were becoming overpopulated, giving rise to improper burials, open graves, and unearthed corpses. Quite naturally, people living close to such places began complaining about the strong stench of decomposing flesh and the spread of diseases from the cemeteries.

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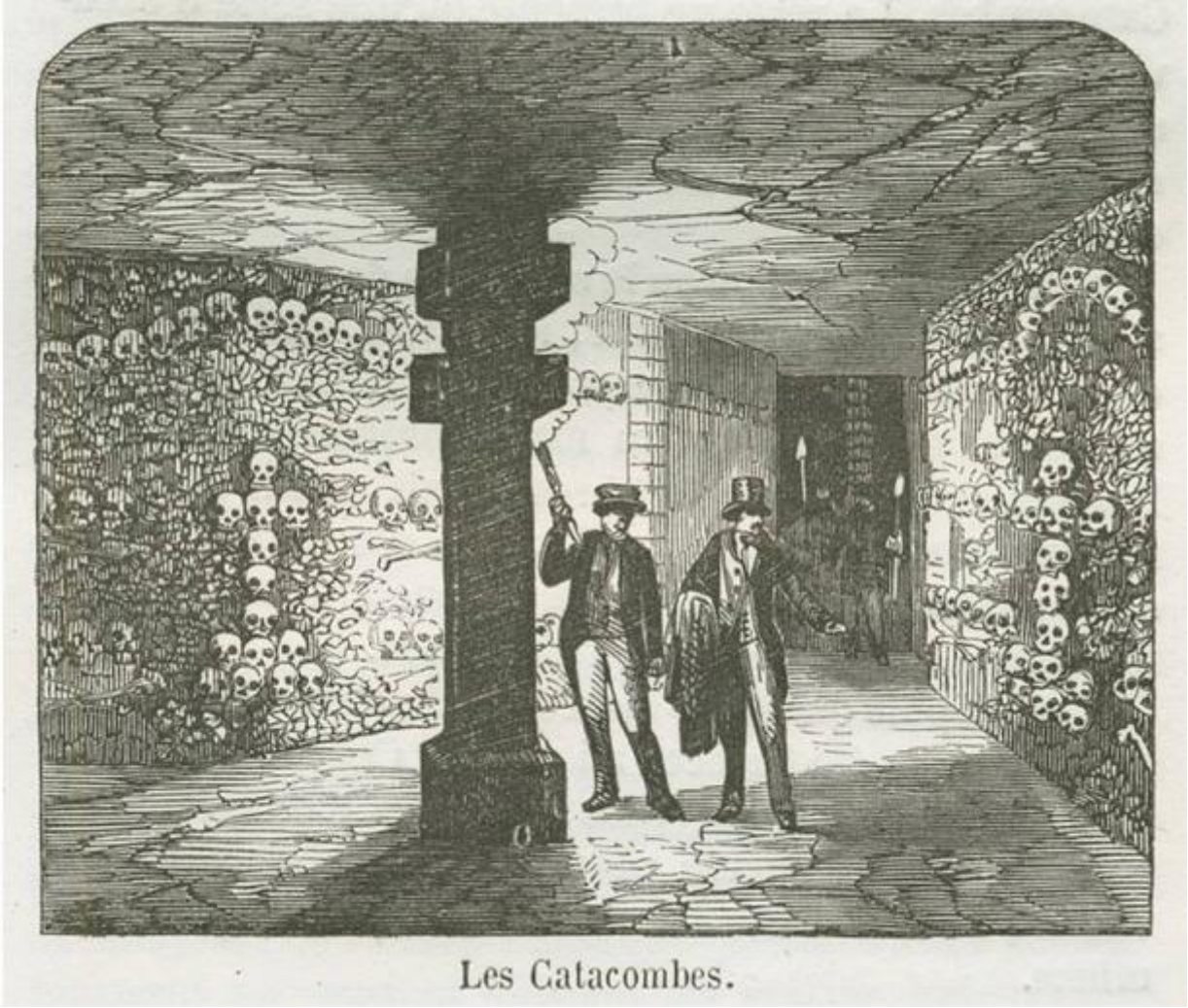
In 1763, an edict was issued by Louis XV banning all burials from the capital. The Church, however, did not wish to disturb or move the cemeteries, and opposed the edict. As a result, nothing was done. The situation persisted until 1780, when an unusually long period of spring rain caused a wall around the *Les Innocents* to collapse, resulting in the spilling of rotting corpses into a neighboring property. By this time, the French authorities were forced to take action.

Engraving depicting the Saints Innocents cemetery in Paris, around the year 1550. ***Public Domain***

In 1786, the former *Tombe-Issoire* quarries were blessed and consecrated, turning them into the **Paris Catacombs** . It took two years for all the bones from the *Les Innocents* to be transferred to the catacombs. Over the following decades, the bones of the dead were removed from cemeteries around Paris for reburial in the catacombs. Furthermore, the practice of burying the newly dead directly in the catacombs began after the French Revolution.



A view of the Catacombs under Paris. The catacombs are a large collection of bones and ossuaries under the city.
Engraving, 1855. Public Domain

It was only in 1859 that the final transfer of bones was undertaken during the renovation of Paris by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, and the work was finally completed in 1860. Seven years later, the catacombs were open to the public. In total the winding catacombs stretch over 300 kilometers (186 miles).

Bones from the former Magdeleine cemetery. Deposited in 1844 in the western ossuary (bone repository) and transferred to the catacombs in September 1859. Wikimedia ***Commons***

The Weird Underworld of the Catacombs

Although the Paris Catacombs are still open to the general public today, access is limited to only a small fraction of the network. It has been illegal since 1955 to enter the other parts of the catacombs.

Nevertheless, during the 1970s and 80s, the catacombs have been explored illegally by Parisian urban explorers known as Cataphiles. Some of the spaces have even been restored and turned into creative spaces. One of these underground caverns, for instance, was transformed into a secret amphitheater, complete with a giant cinema screen, projection equipment, a couple of films and seats. The neighboring area was revamped into a fully-stocked bar and a restaurant, perhaps where the patrons of the amphitheater could get a snack or a meal.

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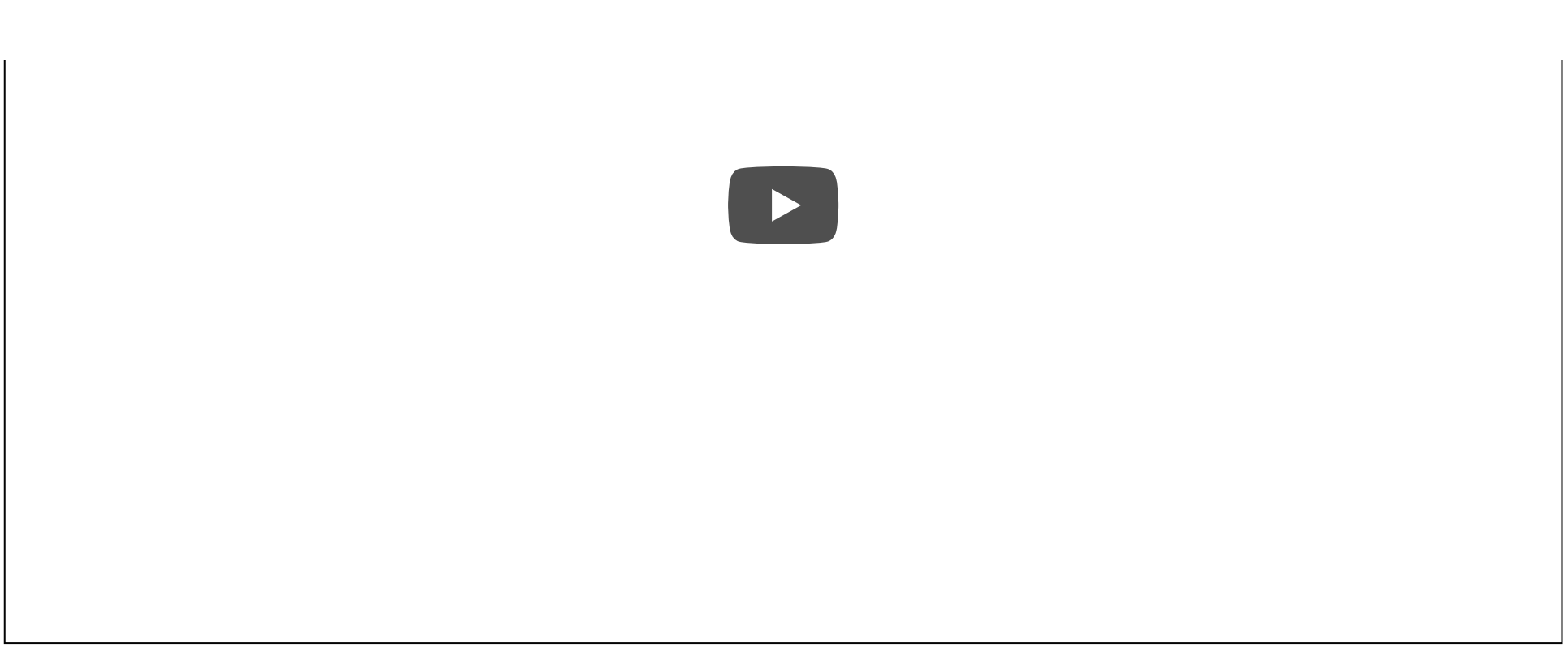
It has been estimated that as many as 300 Cataphiles enter the catacombs each week via secret entrances. Non-Cataphiles and tourists, however, are not often welcome.

From its beginnings as a limestone quarry to its use for the burial of the dead in the 18 th century, and the part it plays today in the lives of the Cataphiles, the Paris Catacombs have been an important feature of the city.

The Dark Underworld of the Paris Catacombs



Although systematic exploration of the underground tunnels may bring to light the extent of the catacombs, it would probably not meet with approval from all quarters. After all, the secrecy of the catacomb networks, and the opportunity to escape from the hustle and bustle of the city above, are attractive concepts to the Cataphiles, and they would probably not let go of their haunts so easily.

The living and the dead both inhabit the Paris Catacombs. Jay Springett/ ***Flickr***

Top image: Countless skeletal remains line the tunnels and chambers of the Paris Catacombs (dirk94025 / Adobe Stock)

By **Ḏḥwty**

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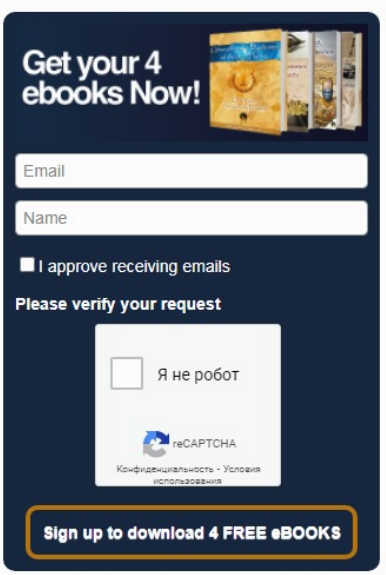
His famous pilgrimage to **Mecca** in 1324, during which he distributed vast amounts of gold to the people he encountered, cemented his reputation as a generous and wealthy king. In fact, his gifts were sometimes so generous they caused hyperinflation, **wrecking entire economies** . This is everything you need to know about the life and times of Mansa Musa, his wealth, his legacy, and his impact on history.

*Top image: African king. Source: **Aleksandr Borisenko** / Adobe Stock.*

By **Robbie Mitchell**



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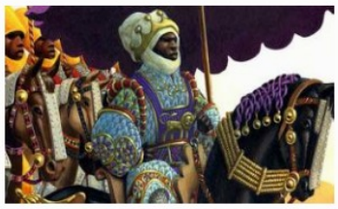

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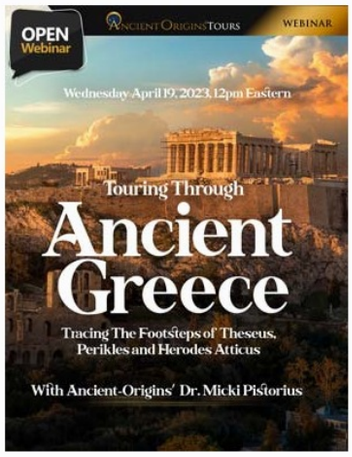

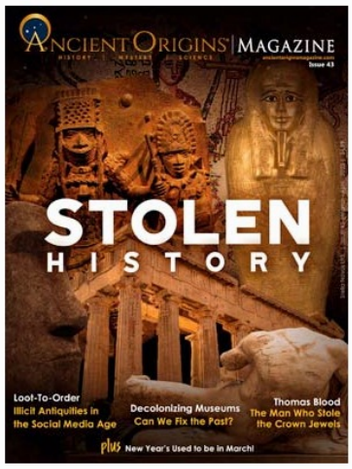

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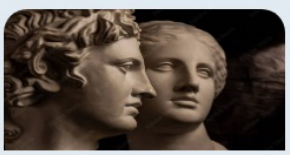

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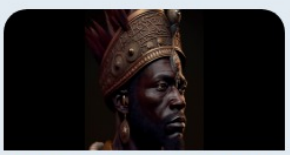

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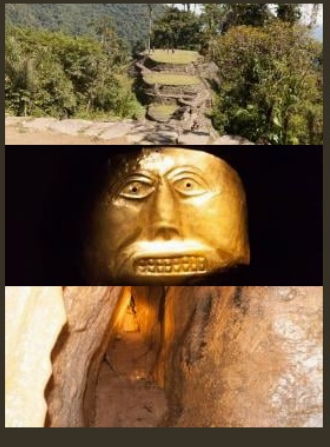

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UPDATED 3 APRIL, 2020 - 19:47 BRYAN HILL

The Kaaba Black Stone: A Holy Stone from Outer Space?

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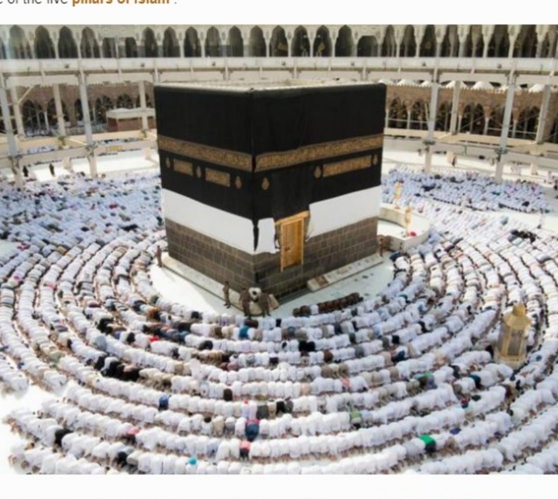
Every day, five times a day, Muslims across the world face the holy site of Mecca and pray. Mecca is believed to be the birthplace of the **Prophet Muhammad** but when followers visit the site, it is not actually Mecca they are facing but a building called the Ka'aba. The Ka'aba is a mosque and on one corner of this sacred building, is a cornerstone known as the Black Stone. Its history is shrouded in mystery and there is much speculation over what the stone might be. Many Muslims believe the stone is in fact a meteorite possessing supernatural powers.

The Hajj Pilgrimage Ritual

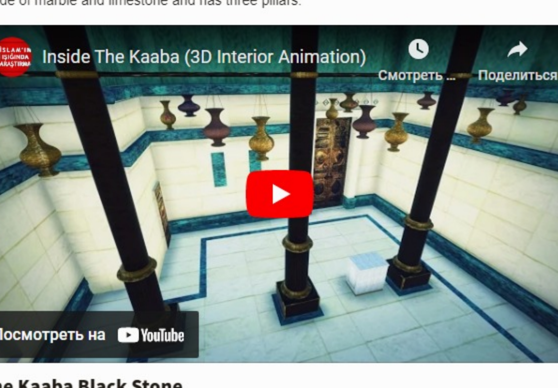
Millions of Muslims travel to Mecca, Saudi Arabia every year and in a single day, **Mecca** is capable of attracting over two million Muslim followers for the annual hajj pilgrimage, considered one of the five **pillars of Islam** .



Muslims praying around the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (***Jasmin Merdan*** */Adobe Stock)*

There, they gather around the Ka'aba, often written simply as Kaaba, a cubic-shaped building at the center of Islam's most sacred **mosque**, Al-Masjid al-Haram. During the ritual of the hajj, pilgrims must walk around the Kaaba seven times in a counterclockwise direction, a ceremonial practice that has been going on for fourteen centuries.

The Kaaba measures 50 feet (15.2 meters) high, 35 feet (10.7 meters) wide and 40 feet (12.2 meters) long. It is covered with a black silk cloth, known as the *kiswa* and decorated with gold-embroidered calligraphy. On the southeast side of the building is a gold door. Inside, the floor is made of marble and limestone and has three pillars.



The Kaaba Black Stone

The Kaaba is built around a sacred Black Stone which is tucked away in the eastern corner about five feet off the ground. **Muslims** believe the prophet Mohammad once kissed the stone and during their mandatory, once in a lifetime (at least), trip to Kaaba, they try to kiss the Black Stone if possible.

If they are unable to, they simply point to it every time they pass on their seven-circle journey around the Kaaba. Each time pilgrims pass the Black Stone they recite a prayer from the **Qur'an**: 'In the name of God, and God is supreme.' Non-Muslims are strictly forbidden from touching it and most of the year the Kaaba is covered in black cloth.

Most of the year the Kaaba is covered in black cloth. (***hikrcn*** */Adobe Stock)*

The Cause of the Ka'aba Black Stone's Color

The **stone** is often described as a fragmented dark rock somewhere around two feet (0.61 meters) in length. Its surface is blackish in color, but there is speculation that this is due to how much it has been touched, along with the oils with which it is anointed. According to **Muslim tradition** , the stone was originally white, but turned black from being in a world where it absorbed humanity's sins.

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First described in Western literature in the 19th century, Swiss traveler Johann Ludwig Burckhardt visited Mecca in 1814 and provided a detailed description of the Black Stone in his 1829 book ' *Travels in Arabia*':

> "It is an irregular oval, about seven inches in diameter, with an undulated surface composed of about a dozen smaller stones of different sizes and shapes, well joined together with a small quantity of cement and perfectly well smooth; it looks as if the whole had been broken into as many pieces by a violent blow and then united again."

History of the Ka'aba Black Stone

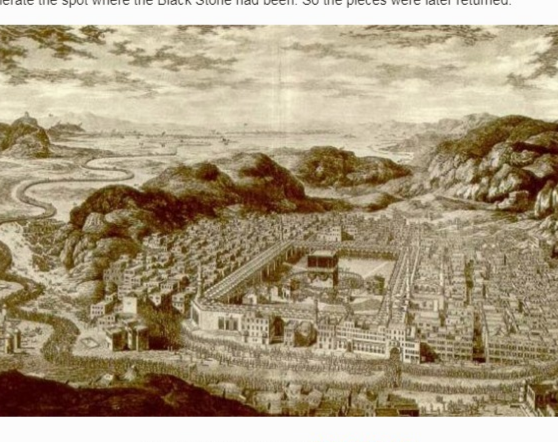
Muslims believe that **Allah** ordered the Kaaba to be constructed. The story goes that Abraham built the mosque with his oldest son, Ishmaeel, in the likeness of Allah's home in heaven.

Purportedly the oldest mosque on Earth, it is believed to have been originally used by pagans before Islam came into existence. According to Islamic tradition, the stone was set intact into the Kaaba's wall by the Islamic prophet Muhammad in the year 605 AD.

Muslims also believe that the Kaaba stone was once part of the stones of heaven. There are various versions of its story of origin, all similar to the one another. When Adam was banished from the **Garden of Eden** , he was filled with sin. The Black Stone was given to him to erase this sin and allow him entrance back into heaven. Some instead believe the ancient stone was brought from a nearby mountain by the archangel Gabriel.

Over the passage of time, the stone has undergone significant damage. During the Umayyad siege of Mecca in 683 AD it is said to have been struck and smashed to pieces by a stone fired from a **catapult**.

In 930 AD it was stolen by a small Shiite sect called the Qarmatians, who took it back to their base in Hajar, modern day Bahrain. According to the Ottoman historian Qutb al-Din, the Qarmatian leader, Abu Tahir al-Qarmati, set the Black Stone up in his own mosque, with the intention of redirecting the hajj away from Mecca. This failed because pilgrims continued to venerate the spot where the Black Stone had been. So the pieces were later returned.



Drawing of Mecca (1850). (***Public Domain*** *)*

There are even stories about people being killed for trying to make contact with the stone. In the 11th century, a man allegedly attempted to smash it and was killed on the spot, causing only slight damage to the stone.

According to the Swiss traveler Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, in 1674 someone smeared the Black Stone with excrement so that "everyone who kissed it retired with a sullied beard". Persians were suspected of being responsible and were the target of curses from other Muslims for centuries afterwards.

Today, **the stone is still broken up into several pieces** , with estimates ranging from seven to as many as fifteen fragments. These are held together by a silver frame, which is fastened to the stone by silver nails.

The Ka'aba Black Stone with its frame (***Harry Marlan/Google+*** *)*

Is the Kaaba Black Stone a Meteorite?

Since no scientific studies have been allowed on the stone, it is only possible to speculate what it could be. Theories have ranged from the stone being basalt, agate, or obsidian rock, to an alien artifact. One theory proposes that the stone is a **meteorite** worshiped by the pre-Muslim, pagan Arabs.

According to Anthony Hampton and his team of geologists at Oxford University, "Part of the fog surrounding this stone is that the stone 's caretakers haven't allowed any scientific tests to be performed on the stone, for obvious cultural and religious reasons."

Thus, attempts have been made to find other ways to obtain information about it. Local samples of sand taken from a 2 km (1.2 mile) radius of the stone, revealed quantities of iridium, a metal found in meteorites with an abundance much higher than its average abundance in the Earth's crust.

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Also found were many shatter cones, a rare geological feature, only known to form in the bedrock beneath meteorite impact craters or underground nuclear explosions.

Drawing of the front view of the Black Stone. (***Public Domain*** *)*

However, another study done by Robert S. Dietz and John McHone at the University of Illinois in 1974 concluded that the Black Stone was probably not a meteorite or supernatural in origin. An anonymous Arab geologist who **made the Hajj** and examined the stone, saw diffusion banding, which points to it being an agate rock.

While today there is no consensus regarding its makeup, the Black Stone of the Kaaba is probably the most well-known holy rock in the world and it continues to be the centerpiece of the sacred Islamic pilgrimage.

Top Image: The Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Source: ***Aviator70*** */Adobe Stock*

By **Bryan Hill**

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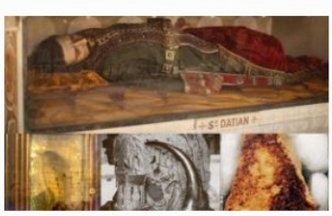

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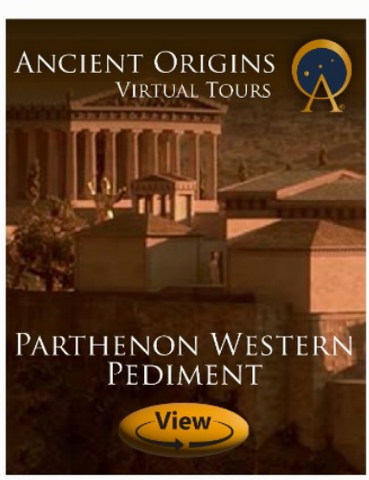

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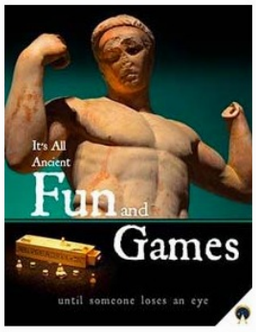

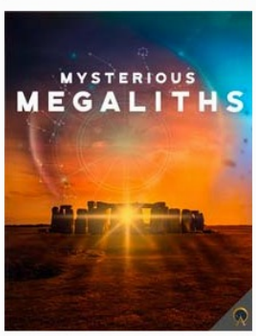

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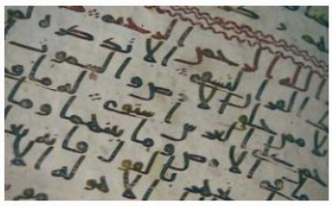

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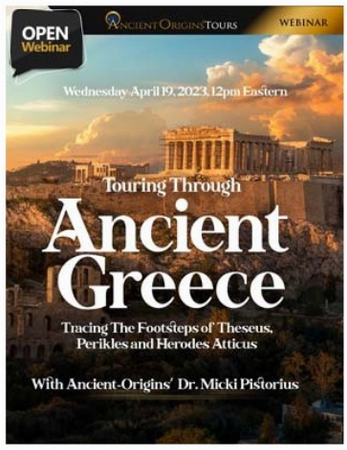

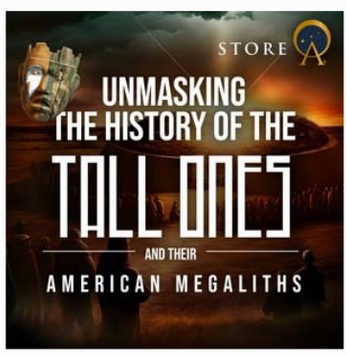

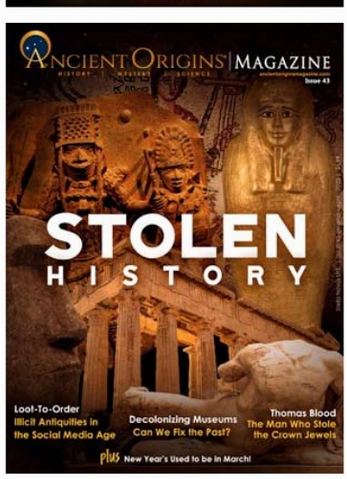

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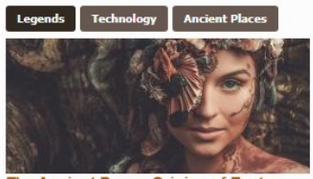

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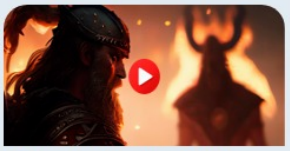

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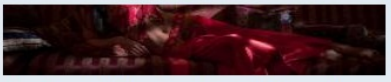

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15 Facts About the Moors You've Probably Never Heard

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The Moors left a significant mark on medieval Europe, especially with their conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 AD. They ruled over **Spain** for several centuries, transforming it culturally, socially and politically. However, the term "Moors" does not refer to a single, homogenous group, but rather to the medieval Muslim inhabitants of various regions, including Sicily, Malta, the Maghreb and al-Andalus.

Despite their influence on Europe, there is still a lot we don't really know about the Moors and the time when they were a powerful contender within Europe. In this article, we will delve into 15 lesser-known facts about the Moors that shed light on their history, providing a deeper understanding of the Moors' impact on European history and their enduring legacy.

1. The 711 AD Moorish Invasion Was a Major Clash of Cultures

The threat faced by Christian Spain across the Strait of Gibraltar was vastly different from anything they had encountered before. The Muslim **Moors** represented a distinct and unfamiliar culture, completely separate from the European Christian world. As a result of this clash of cultures, a new and distinct set of traditions and customs quickly emerged. Even today, the Moors' influence on Spain is palpable, with traces of their culture evident in everyday aspects including language, food and architecture. Though the initial clash between Islam and **Christianity** was hostile, it ultimately served as a wellspring of inspiration, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to shape Spanish culture to this day.

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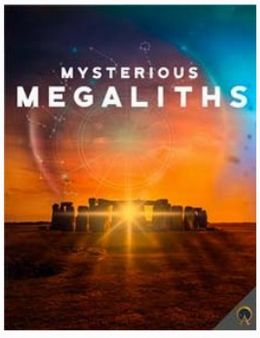

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*The Moors permeated European culture. Shakespeare's Othello, depicted here with Desdemona in Venice in a painting by Théodore Chassériau, was a Moor. (**Public domain**)*

2. The Lead Character of Shakespeare's Othello Is a Moor

Shakespeare's Othello, also known as the Moor of Venice, centers around a noble **Moorish** General in the employ of the Venetian army. This play demonstrates that even during Shakespeare's time, the Moors remained an object of fascination in Europe due to their exotic appearance and distinct culture. Moreover, the historicity of Othello suggests that the Moors were highly skilled and capable of attaining prestigious positions throughout Europe, irrespective of their origins or religion.

Deciphering the Truth Behind the Moors in Spain

El Cid: Christian Champion or Mercenary for the Moors?

3. The Moors Introduced Numerous New Fruits and Vegetables to Europe

The Moors introduced a variety of fruits and vegetables that were previously unknown in both **Spain** and Europe, and thus deemed exotic novelties. These items included peaches, lemons, oranges, saffron, cotton, rice, silk, sugar cane, apricots, figs, dates, pomegranates and many others. Although commonplace today, during the Middle Ages these items were almost alien to the Spanish. Today, centuries later, they have become staples of Spanish production and diet.

*Man picking fruit from a pomegranate tree. (Wellcome Collection / **CC BY 4.0**)*

4. The Arabic Numerals We Use Today Were Brought to Europe by the Moors

The classic numbers we all use and love today are of Arabic origin, introduced by the Moors upon their arrival into Spain. These numbers were quickly adopted as they were simpler and easier to use than the complex and aged system of **Roman** numerals. Additionally, the Moors also introduced paper to Europe, at a time when parchment, made of animal skins, was the common writing medium in medieval Spain. This was a major development essential for the progress of European civilization.

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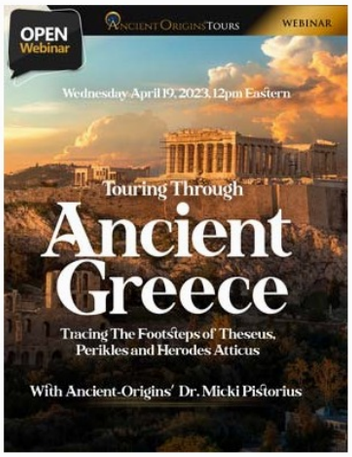

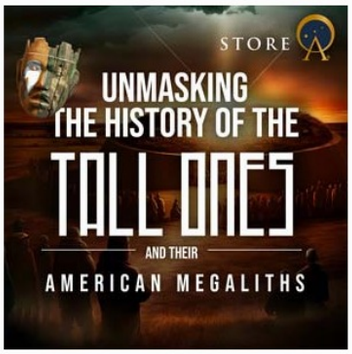

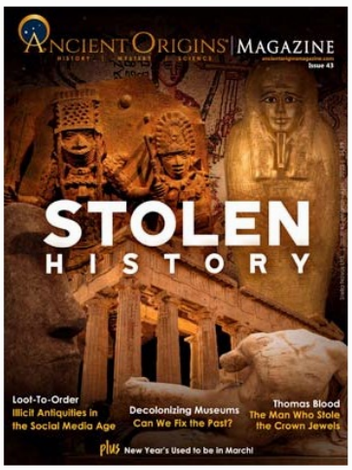

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5. The Moors Were Several Steps Ahead of Medieval Europe

At the time of their conquest of the **Iberian Peninsula** , the advanced civilization of the Arabs was renowned for its architecture, science, mathematics and exploration. Upon their arrival in Spain, the Moors introduced architectural techniques that amazed European stonemasons. One of the most impressive examples of Moorish architecture is the Alhambra, a palace complex and fortress located in Granada, Spain. Construction began in 1238, and it surpassed any similar palace in grandeur and beauty. Today, it remains one of the best-preserved palaces of the Islamic world.

6. Chess Spread Throughout Europe Thanks to the Moors

Even though chess is over 1,500 years old, it was first introduced to Europe in its current form by the Moors. **Chess** spread from India to the Arabic world and was introduced to Spain by the Moors. It quickly became popular and swept across Europe's courts and society. In medieval Spain, chess was a popular game of strategy and patience. The first written mention of chess in Spain dates back to 1010 AD, in the Catalonian Testament.

*The bell tower of the Cathedral in Seville is known as La Giralda, built as the minaret for the Great Mosque of Seville during the reign of the Almohad Dynasty in the 9th century. After the reconquest the mosque was symbolically converted into a Cathedral. (**Aranami** / Adobe Stock)*

7. The Moors Were Very Strict About Their Hygiene

The Moors were known for their love of cleanliness, with a popular saying claiming that a Moor "would rather go without bread than without **soap**." Due to their traditions and the rigors of their religion, the Moors were fond of looking spic and span, and encouraged frequent bathing; In the Moorish town of **Cordoba**, there were around 900 **public baths** . This allowed for proper hygiene during a time when plumbing and running water were not yet widely available. Some sources also claim that the Moors brought some form of soap to Europe, introducing a new era of **cleanliness**.

8. The Career of Ziryab, the Famed Moorish Musician, Flourished in Spain

Ziryab, whose name meant “blackbird,” was a renowned poet, oud and lute player adored in the Islamic world. Having arrived in Spain in 822, Ziryab settled in Cordoba, where he became an instant court favorite. Ziryab was very influential, setting new fashion trends, inspiring singing and poetry, and even inventing a type of deodorant and **toothpaste**. Described as a major trendsetter, Ziryab was a great lover of local cuisine, having invented many new culinary recipes in Moorish Spain. Could it be that through the efforts of a single, visionary man, the whole of Europe benefited?

9. Education Was Very Important to the Moors

Education was of utmost importance to the Moors, who ensured that it was universally available to all within their realm. This stood in stark contrast to medieval Europe, where 90% of the population remained illiterate, and education was reserved for only the wealthiest nobles and clergy. In fact, there were even some European Kings who could not read or write. The Moors established 17 great universities in Spain, located in cities such as Cordoba, Malaga, Granada, Seville, Toledo and Almeria, among others.

The renowned musician Ziryab settled in Cordoba after the Moors conquered the Iberian

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*Peninsula. He is depicted here singing and playing the lute in his garden. (**Public domain**)*

10. Numerous Moorish Words Found Their Way into Modern Spanish and English

After their arrival in Europe, the **Moors** brought with them new concepts and words that quickly became a standard part of everyday language. Spanish has up to 4,000 words of Arabic origin, including algebra, checkmate, and influenza. Other examples are cipher, alcohol, chemistry, typhoon, orange, alkaline, cable and nadir.

11. One of the Best Histories of the Moors in Al-Andalus Was Written Around 1617

The author was a famed Algerian historian, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqarī al-Tilmisānī. His work is named "Nafḥ aṭ-ṭīb", or "Breath of Perfume", and it is a compendium of the entire history of al-Andalus and the Moors who dwelt there. It was such a detailed and influential work that it provided the basis for the research of Muslim Spain for numerous historians up to the 20th century. Al-Maqqari was inspired by the glories of Moorish Iberia, and wrote his work based on the pre-existing accounts he discovered in the Saadi Sultanate library at Marrakesh in Morocco.

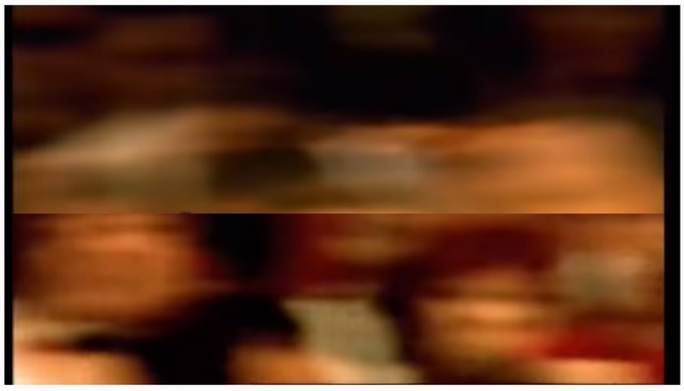
*A Moor preaching at the mosque in Cordoba, in a painting by Edwin Lord Weeks circa 1880.(**Public domain**)*

12. At the Height of Moorish Rule, Cordoba Was the Most Modern City in Europe

During the 10th and 11th centuries, Cordoba was the very center of the Moorish world, and a great center of learning, education, and economy. The second-biggest city in Europe, Cordoba had over 80 libraries, as well as some of the most advanced knowledge of **medicine**, mathematics, botany and astronomy - far superior to the rest of Europe. It was also very modern for its time, having beautiful architecture, raised sidewalks for pedestrians, many miles of road and even street lighting.

13. The Moors Were Very Industrious

Upon their arrival in Iberia, the Moors saw the potential in the old Roman irrigation systems they found and quickly adopted, enhanced and revived them. This led to a surge in agricultural productivity and a boost in the economy. They were also able to cultivate new crops they brought with them such as lemons, oranges, figs, dates, and apricots. Soon, Spain became one of the largest producers of crops in Europe, all thanks to the Moors' innovative irrigation techniques.



14. The Moors Greatly Transformed Spanish Cuisine

Spices were a rare commodity for Europeans, and their food was often considered bland. The Moors changed that by bringing over hundreds of unique spices, new recipes and innovative methods of preparing food. This culinary revolution gave rise to many wondrous dishes that we still enjoy today. The Moorish spice markets were famous for their variety, offering choice for cooks of all styles. The colors and smells of these medieval markets must have been truly incredible.

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15. The Moors Had a *Major* Impact on the European Renaissance

Thanks to their introduction of arts, education, astronomy, mathematics and music, the Moors greatly enhanced existing European culture. Their architecture was a whirlwind of color and detail, their cuisine a typhoon of spices and flavors, their music enigmatic and exotic, their fashion sense unique and flamboyant. The Moors brought a vibrant splash of color to an otherwise gray medieval Europe. Despite being invaders, whose arrival often brought death and suffering, their greatest contribution was the infusion of artistic and cultural richness that transformed the region.

*Medieval painting depicting a Christian and a Moor playing chess. (**Public domain**)*

An Invasion That Brought Both Good and Bad

The Moors arrived during a tumultuous time in Iberia, which had seen many cultures come and go leaving the peninsula ravaged by **war** and soaked in blood. The Moors capitalized on this situation, quickly overwhelming the Visigothic Kingdom and revitalizing Spain with their colorful culture in the process of their conquest. The presence of the Moors in Europe cannot be overlooked. After all, sometimes it takes an invasion to breath new life into a civilization and introduce beneficial aspects into a culture.

The Moors endured for several centuries in Iberia, but Spanish **Christians** continued to yearn their lost territory. In response they launched the Reconquista, a war which in just a few generations drove the Moors back to the sea until they were finally expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. Yet even so, the marks left behind by the Moors in Spain would never be erased.

*Top image: The Moors left behind a legacy of culture and architecture, such as the Alhambra palace complex in Granada, Spain. Source: **lunamarina** / Adobe Stock*

By **Aleksa Vučković**

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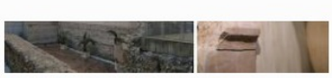

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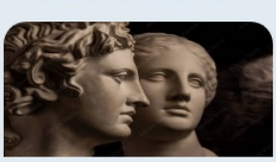

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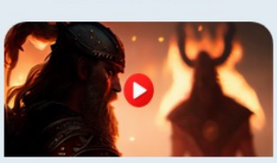

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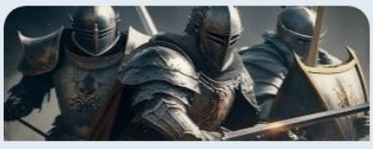

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The Notorious Hashshashins, the Original Assassins of Persia

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When it comes to legends, none is quite as moviesque as that of the Hashshashins, who in the Middle Ages inspired fear in the hearts of leaders in the Middle East. Hassan-i Sabbah, dubbed the Old Man of the Mountain by none other than Marco Polo, was the leader of an order of Nizari Isma'ilis in the late 11th century. These were the notorious Hashshashins, who created a network of mountain fortresses and posed a threat to Sunni Seljuk authority in Persia. Perhaps the Hashshashin were most famous for the *way* they got rid of their opponents – through highly-skilled assassinations. In fact, the word "assassin" is said to have originated with the Hashshashin.

*Hassan-i Sabbah, the radical Isma'ili missionary and brainchild behind the Hashshashins, depicted in Marco Polo's Livre des merveilles. (**Public domain**)*

The Complex Background of the Fabled Hashshashins

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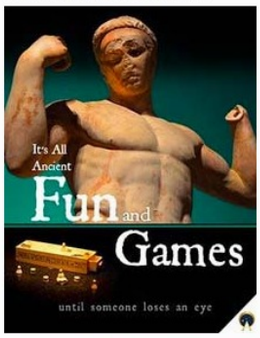

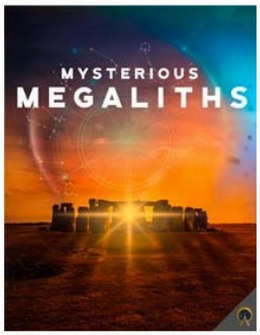

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Although there are many stories about the Hashshashin, it is rather difficult to separate fact from fiction. For a start, much of the historic evidence regarding the Hashshashin has come either from European sources or people who were hostile towards them.

Deadly Strategies and Ruthless Tactics of the Ancient Assassins

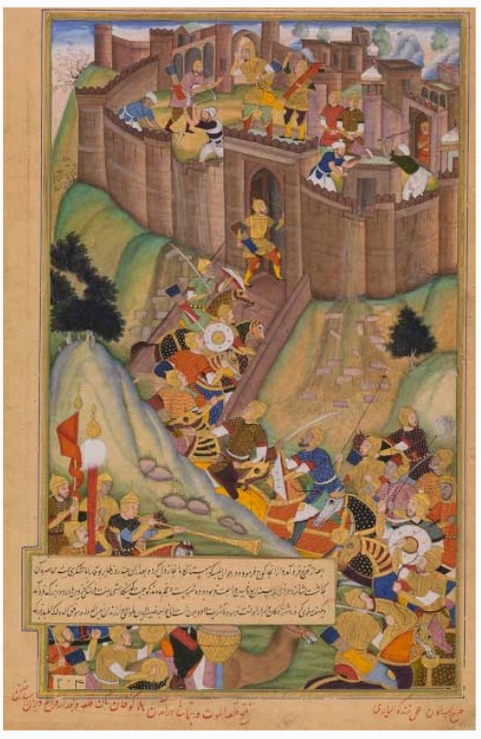
History of Assassins: When Human Hunter-Killers Began Hunting Humans

The story of the Hashshashins goes back to the original schism in Islam which took place in 632 AD. At the time **Muslims** argued over who would succeed the **Prophet Muhammad** as their leader, which caused a divide between the Shiites and Sunnis. The Nizari Isma'ili state then emerged out of Shia Islam, when another power struggle forced the followers of the Isma'ili Prince Nizar to flee into the mountains of **Persia**.

*View of Alamut Castle in Qazvin, Iran, the base camp of the Nizari Isma'ili leader Hassan-i Sabbah and his military group known as the Hashshashins. (Alireza Javaheri / **CC BY 3.0**)*

The radical Isma'ili missionary, by the name of Hassan-i Sabbah, on the run from Cairo for having supported Nizar, ended up founding a sub sect of Isma'ilism, known as Nizari Isma'ilism. On the hunt for a base from which to manage his missionary work, Hassan-i Sabbah set his sights on Alamut Castle in modern-day Iran. Its location was ideal, with a bird's eye view over the surrounding valley.

With a campaign lasting about two years, which converted the people living in the surrounding areas, Hassan-i Sabbah managed to conquer the castle in 1090. Studious and dedicated to his religion, he is remembered for knowing the Qur'an by heart and for spreading Nizari Isma'ilism from his new basecamp at Alamut Castle.



*Persian miniature depicting the Hashshashins fortress of Alamut in Iran. (**Public domain**)*

He then set up **strongholds** within mountainous areas throughout Persia and Syria, furnished with complex water infrastructure and built to withstand sieges. Some of their remains can still be visited today, including the partially restored Alamut Castle or the Lambsar Castle in the Alburz mountains of Iran.

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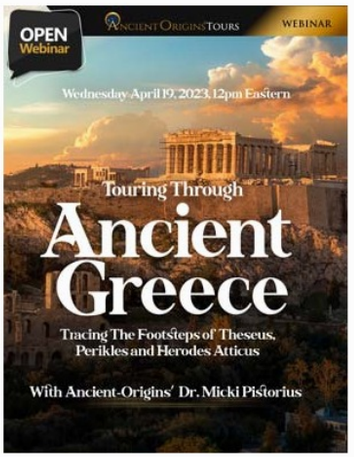

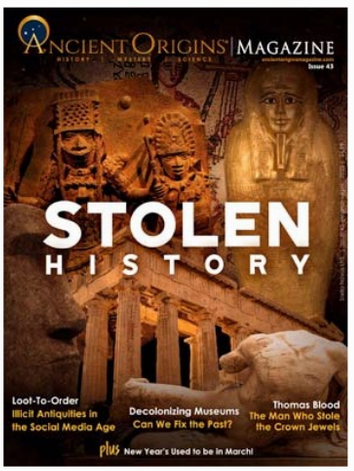

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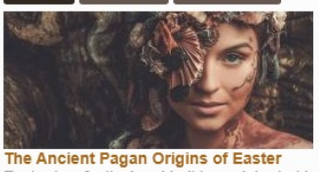

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Hassan-i Sabbah is also remembered for having created a military group of trained *fedayeen* (meaning "self-sacrificers" in Arabic) fighters, known as the Order of **Assassins** or the Hashshashin. Severely outnumbered, the Nizari Isma'ili were hated by both the Shiite and Sunni **Muslims** who surrounded them on all sides. These Hashshashin became known for their deadly tactics and religious devotion, which were developed due to their hazardous situation.

An artist's depiction of a hashshashin. (Fair Use)

Marco Polo and the "Drug-Fuelled" Hashshashins

According to a story heard in the orient by the Italian traveler **Marco Polo** , Hassan-i Sabbah would drug his followers with *hashish*, an extract from the **cannabis** plant. When they came to their senses, Hassan-i Sabbah would claim that he was the only one who had the means to allow them to return to paradise. In this version of events, the devotion of the *fedayeen* was drug-fuelled and led them to carry out his every will.

Nevertheless, there are some problems with this story. For instance, the use of *hashish* might have been an early case of **fake news** or plain old ignorance. Due to their lack of manpower and resources the *fedayeen* developed subversive guerilla strategies whereby they would carry out precise assassinations on specific targets, enemies of the Nizari Isma'ili. Some claim that the term Hashshashin came from the derogatory Arabic word used for hashish users, *Hashishin.* "Historians believe that Western observers, who did not understand why the Nizari fought with guerrilla tactics, assumed they were under the thrall of some kind of drug like hashish," explained ***National Geographic*** .

Others argue that term *hashshishi was* first used by the Fatimid caliph al-Amir in 1122 as a derogatory reference to the Syrian Nizaris. Instead of literally meaning that these people took the hashish drug, some claim it was supposed to be taken figuratively as a way to refer to "outcasts" or "rabble." This term was applied by anti-Isma'ili historians to the Syrian and Persian Isma'ilis, and eventually spread through Europe via the **Crusaders**. The term " **assassin**" is thought to be rooted in the name Hashshashin.

*19th-century lithograph by Gustave Dore envisions the attempted assassination of England's King Edward I by an assassin, or Hashshashin, sent by the Mamluck Sultan Baibars . (**Public domain**)*

Tall Tales About the Hashshashins

The Hashshashin have been remembered for the assassinations they perpetrated over the course of almost 200 years. Nevertheless, some have even questioned the reputation of the Hashshashin as cold-blooded killers. There were indeed those who were murdered by the Hashshashin in broad daylight, but their reputation preceded them and for a time it was common during their era to lay the blame for any significant political murder at the feet of the Hashshashin.

Perhaps one of their most famous victims is Conrad of Montferrat, the *de facto* King of Jerusalem at the end of the 12th century. Legend has it that Conrad was murdered while strolling

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in the courtyard of the city of Tyre with an entourage of mailed knights. Two Hashshashin, disguised as Christian monks, walked towards the center of the courtyard and stabbed Conrad twice, killing him. Whilst it is unknown who hired these Hashshashin, it has been commonly claimed that **Richard the Lionheart** and Henry of Champagne were responsible.

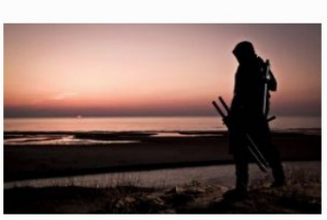
*14th-century painting of the successful assassination of Nizam al-Mulk, a vizier or high-ranking official of the Seljuk Empire, by an Assassin or fedayeen, also known as the Hashshashin. It is often considered the most significant assassination perpetrated by the Nizari Isma'ilis. (**Public domain**)*

The Use of Psychological Warfare by the Hashshashins

What is even more impressive than the boldness of the Hashshashin is perhaps their efficient use of **psychological warfare** . By instilling fear into their enemies, they managed to gain their submission without risking their own lives. The great Muslim leader, **Saladin**, for instance, survived two Hashshashin **assassination** attempts, which left him paranoia and afraid for his life.

One story claimed that Saladin woke up one night during his conquest of Masyaf, in Syria, and saw someone leaving his tent. Beside his bed he discovered hot scones in the shape characteristic to the Hashshashin, along with a note pinned down with a poisoned dagger. The note threatened that he would be killed if he failed to withdraw. Needless to say, Saladin decided to negotiate a truce with the Hashshashin.

Despite their notoriety and skill, the Hashshashin were wiped out by the Mongols who were invading Khwarizm. In 1256, the Hashshashin stronghold at Alamut, once thought to be impregnable, fell to the Mongols. Although the Hashshashin succeeded in recapturing and holding Alamut for several months, they were ultimately crushed in 1275.



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From a historian's perspective, the **Mongol** conquest of Alamut is a highly significant event. Unfortunately, there are no sources remaining to tell the story from the Hashshashin perspective and as a result all that remains is a somewhat romanticized view of the Hashshashin order. This has been portrayed in the *Netflix* series Marco Polo and even video games, most famously in the *Assassin's Creed* , which is said to have been inspired by the **Hashshashin**.

*Top image: The Hashshashins were a military group of trained fedayeen fighters, also known as the Order of Assassins. Source: **warmtail** / Adobe Stock*

By Wu Mingren

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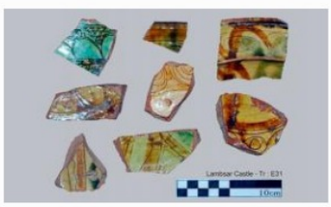

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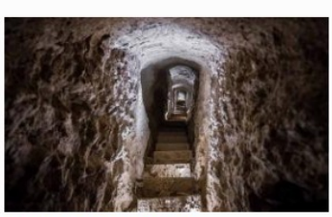

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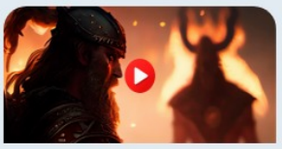

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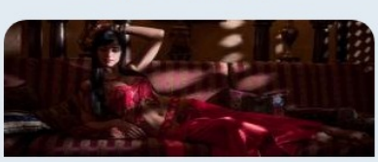

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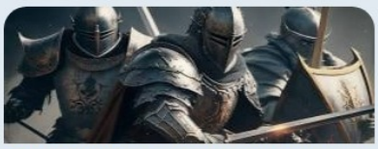

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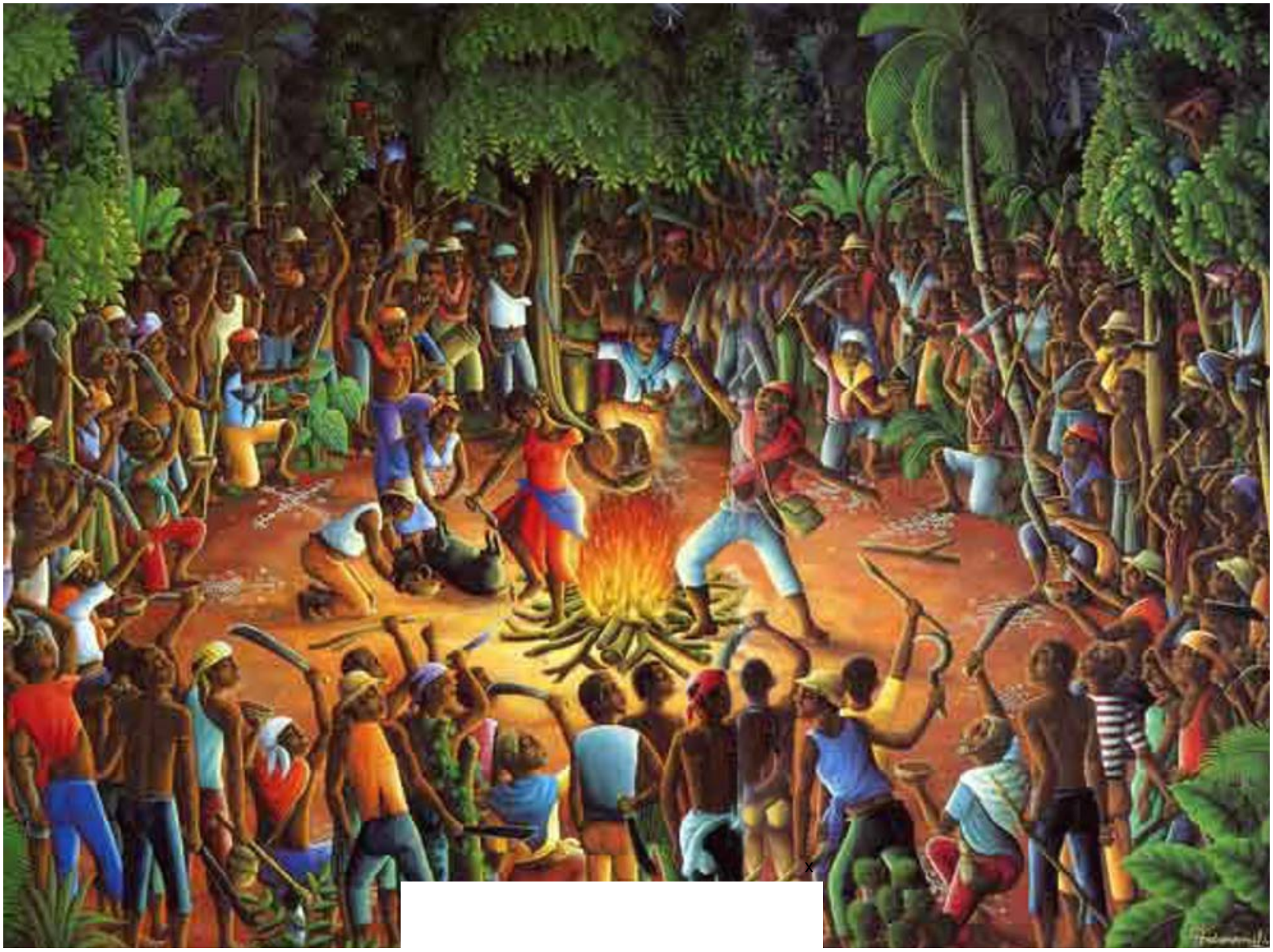

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In 64 AD, a great fire broke out in Rome for six days and devastated much of the city. According to the writer Tacitus, “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.” The “abominations” committed by the early Christians were said to be cannibalism and incest, based on rumors circulating in Rome at that time which stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Eucharist.

This episode in the history of the early Church shows how easily a religion, especially a relatively secretive one, can be misunderstood and misrepresented. A similar case can perhaps be seen in the religion known as Voodoo (also known as Vodou or Voudon).

For many, the word ‘Voodoo’ conjures up images of **magical dolls** with pins stuck in them to inflict pain on one’s enemies and the resurrection of the dead as **zombies**. These images are the result of the misrepresentation of Voodoo by popular culture, and do not accurately represent Voodoo as understood by its practitioners.

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*Most people associate Voodoo with pin-filled dolls, designed to inflict pain on a cursed individual. (**Public domain**)*

What are the Beliefs of Voodoo?

Voudon refers to "a whole assortment of cultural elements: personal creeds and practices, including an elaborate system of **folk medical practices** ; a system of ethics transmitted across generations [including] proverbs, stories, songs, and folklore... voudon is more than belief; it is a way of life," wrote Leslie Desmangles, a Haitian professor at Hartford's Trinity College in "The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal" (Prometheus Books, 1996). “Voudon teaches belief in a supreme being called Bondye, an unknowable and uninvolved creator god,” reports **Live Science** , and explains:

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“Voudon believers worship many spirits (called loa or Iwa), each one of whom is responsible for a specific domain or part of life. So, for example, if you are a farmer you might give praise and offerings to the spirit of agriculture; if you are suffering from unrequited love, you would praise or leave offerings for Erzulie Freda, the spirit of love, and so on. In addition to helping (or impeding) human affairs, loa can also manifest themselves by possessing the bodies of their worshipers. Followers of voudon also believe in a universal energy and a soul that can leave the body during dreams and spirit possession.”

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*Voodoo paraphernalia, Akodessawa Fetish Market, Lomé, Togo . (**sarlay** /Adobe Stock)*

The History of Voodoo

Although the exact origins of Voodoo are unknown, it is generally agreed that this religion has its roots in West Africa. Modern day **Benin** is regarded as the birthplace of this religion, and the name 'Voodoo' itself means 'spirit' in the local Fon language.

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It has been suggested that Voodoo in West Africa evolved from the ancient traditions of ancestor worship and animism. The forms of Voodoo practiced today, however, ar in modern history – the African **slave trade** that took place between th

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Zangbeto, a voodoo guardian of the peace under Yoruba religious belief. Zangbeto traditionally served as an informal police service to enforce the peace in rural Benin. (***pauli197*** */Adobe Stock)*

When African slaves were brought to the Americas to work on **plantations**, they brought Voodoo with them. Their white masters, however, had other plans regarding the religious practices of their slaves. A 1685 law, for instance, prohibited the practice of African religions, and required all masters to Christianize their slaves within eight days of their arrival in Haiti.

Although the slaves accepted Roman Catholicism, they did not give up their traditional beliefs either. Instead, the old and the new were syncretized, producing some unique results. Many of the Catholic saints were identified with traditional Voodoo lwas (spirits) or held a double meaning for the practitioners of Voodoo. For instance, **in Haitian Voodoo** , St. Peter is recognized as Papa Legba, the gatekeeper of the spirit world, while St. Patrick is associated with Dumballah, the snake lwa.

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Birth of Voodoo | National Geographic

Although African slaves were brought to Haiti and New Orleans about the same time, i.e. the 1720s, the development of Voodoo practices in each area is quite different. In Haiti, Voodoo became a force that gave strength to and sustained the slaves through their hardships and suffering. Between 1791 and 1804, a series of slave revolts inspired by Voodoo practice culminated in the expelling of the French from Haiti.

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The Spread of Voodoo Practices

The colonists who survived fled to New Orleans, some accompanied by their French-speaking slaves who were Voodoo practitioners. It is from these new arrivals that Voodoo began to grow in **New Orleans** . Although Voodoo was practiced in that part of the United States prior to 1791, it was not as strong a force as in Haiti, and it was brutally suppressed each time it emerged. It was only in the 19th century that Voodoo practices in New Orleans were codified by the enigmatic Marie Laveau.

*Portrait of Marie Laveau, allegedly d. 1888. (**public domain**)*

Voodoo has since spread to other African nations, the Caribbean, as well as North and South America. In Benin and Haiti, Voodoo is now officially recognized as a religion. Nevertheless, Voodoo is still a rather **misunderstood religion** due to its inaccurate portrayal by the media.

Instead of associating this religion with zombies and Voodoo dolls, we should perhaps take the time to better understand Voodoo, and view it as a way of life or a set of guiding principles held by its believers.

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Top Image: "Vodou Ceremony" by Andre Normil

By **Ḏḥwty**

Updated on January 8, 2021

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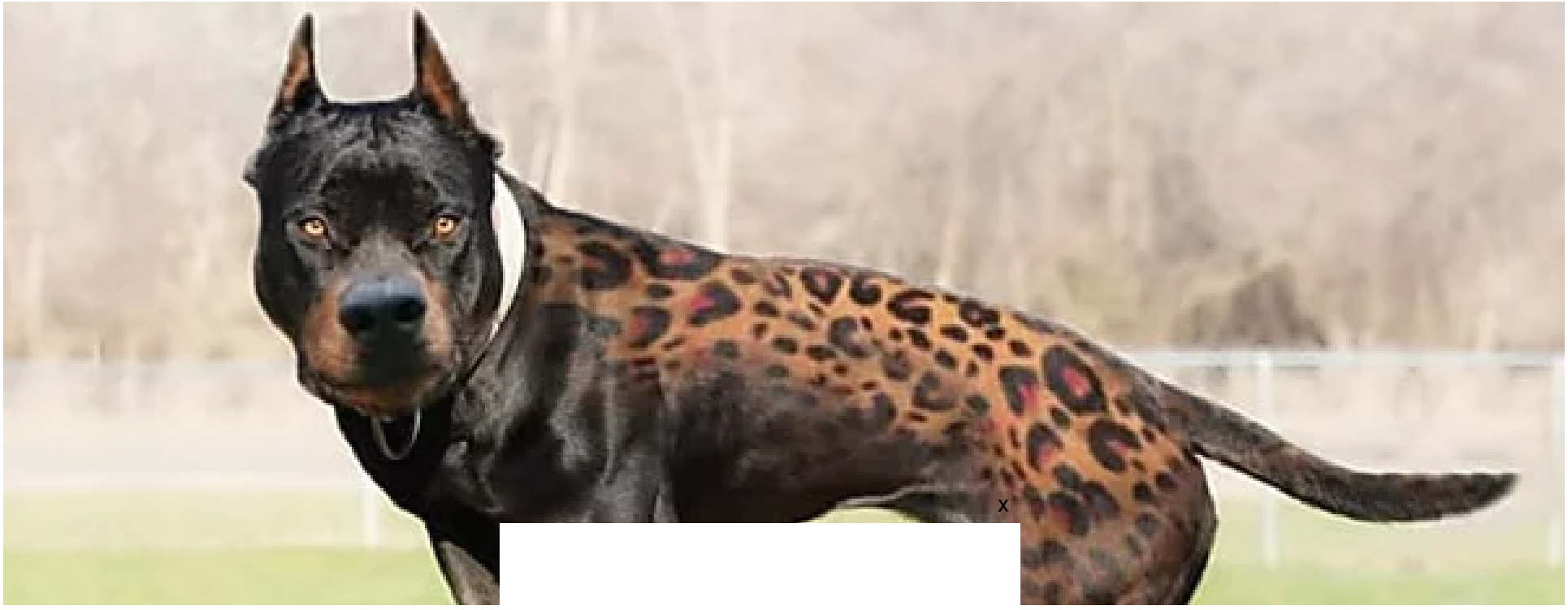

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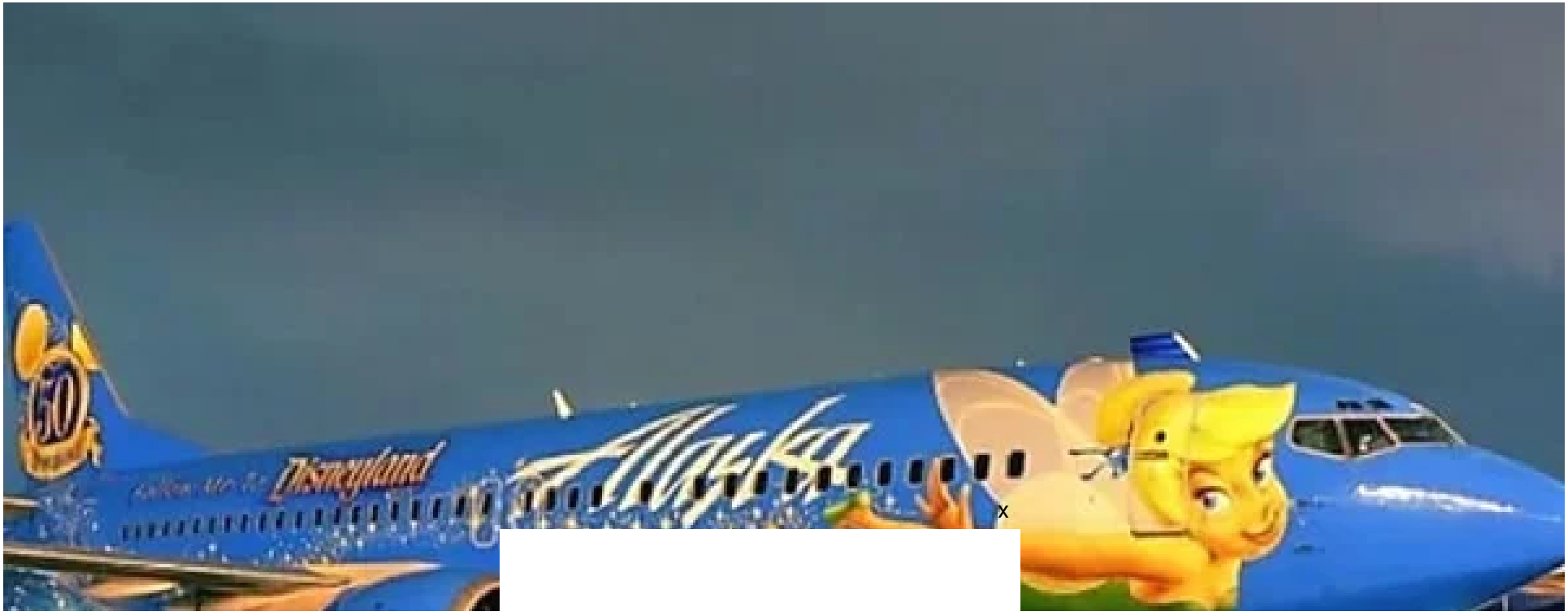

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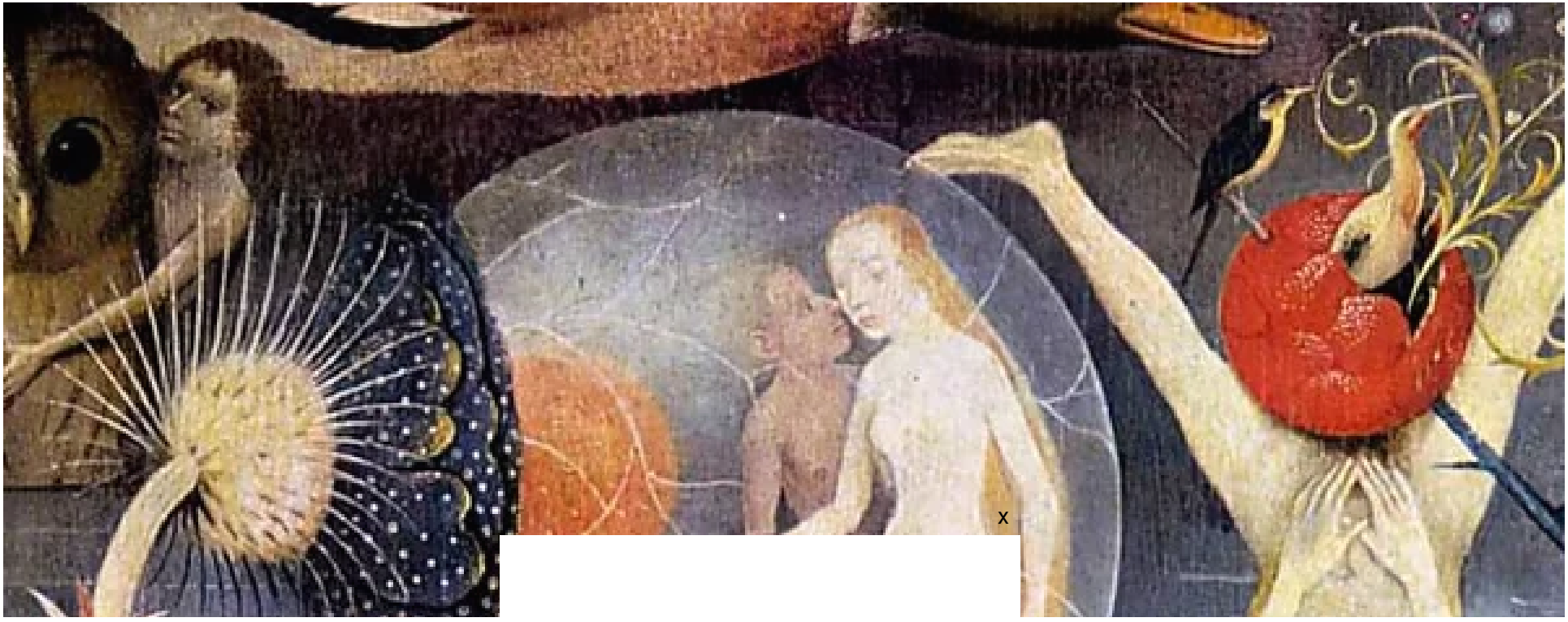

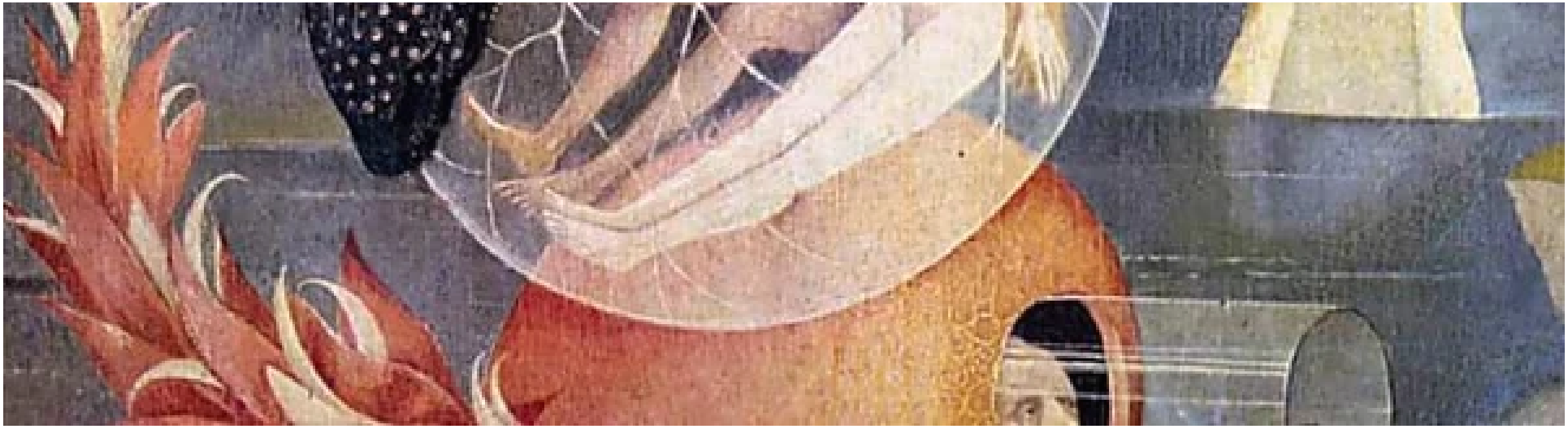

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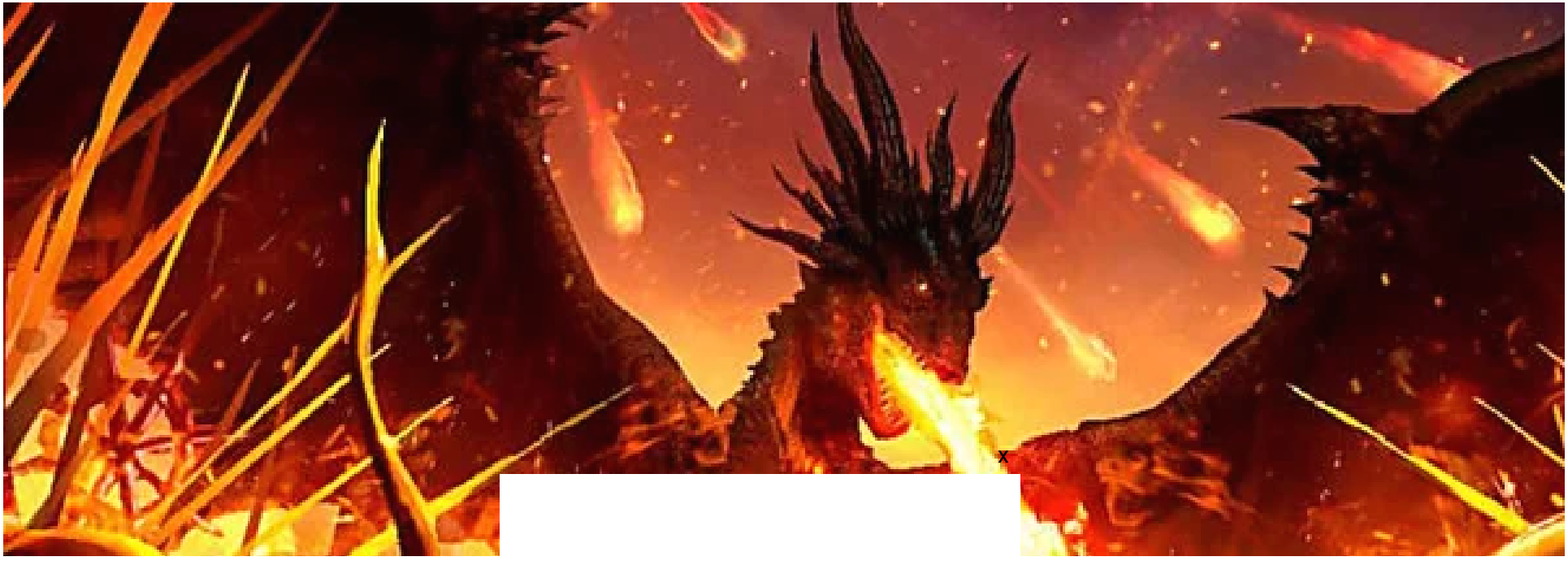

Nidhogg, the Chaos Bringing Dragon of Ancient Norse Mythology

Nidhogg, the soul eating dragon of Norse myth, lives bound in the roots of Yggdrasil, the World Tree, waiting for Ragnarok to free him.

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Wu Mingren ('Dhwty') has a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient History and Archaeology. Although his primary interest is in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, he is also interested in other geographical regions, as well as other time periods.... **Read More**

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History Of Assassins: When Human Hunter-Killers Began Hunting Humans

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For at least 200,000 years *Homo sapiens* were hunter-gatherer-fishers and at the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, they flipped from being the number one prey food on the planet to being the apex predator. One would expect that having dominated every animal on the planet, the global overlords would have evolved from their hyper-violent past, but this is not the case. Rather than working together as hunting teams trying to fell huge megafauna, since the dawn of 'civilization' about 3,000 years ago, history is replete with endless records of highly-trained factions of human hunter-killers.

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*Thuggees strangling a traveler on a highway in India in the early 19th century. (**Public Domain**)*

Assassins, and gangs of them, have appeared throughout history in many formats from inspired political activists to gold-hungry, cold-hearted killers. Killing their targets for a host of reasons, but most having a financial benefit, most of history's renowned specialized killers had deep political affiliations and military allegiances. What they all had in common was the practice of recruiting young members and brainwashing them into the ways of the skilled-murderer. In remote hilltop forts, new recruits were taught the arts of deceit and misdirection so as to become professional manhunters, and in some cases, womanhunters.

*In the year 70 AD the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army during the First Jewish-Roman War by Francesco Hayez (1867) (**Public Domain**)*

Beware Of Crowds: The Sicarii Are On The Loose

The Sicarii were a splinter group of the Jewish Zealots who were active around 70 AD. The name Sicarii is the plural of the Latin ' *Sicarius*' (dagger man) and it was because of the actions of these Jewish freedom fighters (assassins) that the term later became associated with assassins and murderers. The Sicarii began their reign of terror in Jerusalem under the leadership of Menahem, the grandson of Judah, a former Jewish dissident. Unlike most other groups of assassins before them, the Jewish Sicarii were overtly motivated by religion and politics with the prime goal of driving the Roman invaders and their Jewish collaborators from the lands of Judea. Achievement of this goal meant training new recruits on how to conduct various guerrilla operations against Roman convoys and legions in Judea, which differed from all of the other provinces to the east of the Roman Empire in that it never submitted to Roman rule.

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Top Image : *An agent of the Assassins (left, in white turban) fatally stabs Nizam al-Mulk, a Seljuk vizier, in 1092 AD. (14th-century AD manuscript) Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul (*

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UPDATED 20 JULY, 2017 - 19:09 CLYDE WINTERS

East African Invasions in South America: Tracing Cultural Clues and Artifacts Left by Early Travelers

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Archaeologists have found many artifacts that suggest Blacks lived in Pre-Columbian America in locations including Tiahuanaco and Valdivia. Epigraphers and archaeologists have even found evidence that Axumites, Meroites, and Puntites may have voyaged to South America before Columbus.

There is also ample evidence that Sumerians were in South America, which they called *Kuga-Ki*. It was here that the Sumerians mined tin and other minerals. East Africans probably learned about Ecuador and Peru from the Sumerians. During the Arwe and Axumite empires, Semitic or Puntite speaking Ethiopians traveled to South America.

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*Potosi, the first image in Europe. Pedro Cieza de León, 1553. (**Public Domain**) Potosi is a famous mining town in Bolivia.*

Evidence for Early Ethiopans in the Andean Region

Between 13,000 BC and 600 AD, Blacks from East Africa and Asia began settling in South America. Many African skulls have been found in Ecuador, in sections of Chile in Valdivia, and among the Ponuencho of Peru. These countries would have also been part of the Sumerian Kuga-Ki.

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Ecuador has provided substantial archaeological evidence for the presence of Africoids in South America. One of the most significant finds was a magnificent stone head of a man wearing a circular earring on his right ear. This head is similar to a carving of Akhenaton. Dr. von Wuthenau identified this figure as representing the "negroid element" in preclassical Ecuador.

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Alexander Von Wuthenau's Ethiopian Type. (Author provided)

According to Lanning, "there was a possible movement of negritos from Ecuador into the Piura Valley, north of Chicama and Viru." He believes there is a relationship between this culture and the Valdivia site which was active from 1800 BC to 100 AD. Dr. Dixon said Valdivia was inhabited by Africoid people.

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*Valdivia (Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio del Ecuador/ **CC BY 4.0),** Chorrera (**Public Domain**), and Carchi (**Lidia Poaquiza**) representations of individuals who may have been Africans in ancient Ecuador.*

In Peru, large double decked boats are depicted on ceramic pots which are almost identical to the papyrus boats used in the Proto-Sahara and Punt. Water jars and other cargo are painted on the lower deck of the boats along with rows of people. An earthly representation of the Sun god Ra stood on the upper deck, the same as the Sun god of Meroe and Egypt, surrounded by bird men who handle the ropes and propel the ship through the water. The interesting thing about these pictures is that they are almost exact replicas of scenes depicted in Egyptian pyramids.

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*Depiction of a Moche reed boat. (**Bibliodyssey**)*

There are other similarities between Ethiopia and Peru. Ethiopians used battle clubs in war and their doctors became skilled in **trepanning** - cranial surgery without killing the patient. This operation was unknown to Europeans until after Columbus discovered America, yet it was known to the Peruvians. Both groups also used false heads on mummies.

Peruvians and Ethiopians also used horizontal looms staked out on the ground along with the vertical-frame loom with two warp beams (Rowe, 1966). Von Hagen noted that “A form of backstring loom was used in Egypt, a horizontal loom appears in predynastic Egypt, and the one pictured on the tomb Khnemholep (at Beni Hasan) circa 1900 BC, is identical with those of the Andean and coastal Peruvians.”

An indigenous woman using a traditional loom. (Author provided)

Ethiopian explorers probably reached Peru and Ecuador by accident. Chinese records make it clear that Axumites made many long voyages across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These sailors traveled mid-ocean, not near the shore. A group of Ethiopian merchants probably on a voyage to China, Sri Lanka, or Malayasia; or on a military campaign to put down a rebellion in one of their Indian Ocean colonies, may have been captured by the Equatorial Counter Current in their papyrus boats and carried to Peru-Ecuador. Since they were usually prepared for voyages up to five years long, these hypothetical voyagers would have possessed the supplies necessary to make the long trip.

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Early Depictions of East Africans in South America

The Axumites probably landed in sparsely populated areas in Peru- Ecuador. They would have met little resistance from the local Amerindian groups (who saw them as giants.) The Axumites' experience building underground dwellings made it possible for them to construct safe habitation complexes, and later step pyramids, to bury their elite. As in Meroe, Peruvian pyramids were made of bricks of sun dried clay mixed with straw - using the same formula as Egyptians and Ethiopians. Peruvian adobe was made in a rectangular mold, just like in Ethiopia.

*Detail of adobe relief motif at the Chan Chan complex built by the Chimor culture near modern Trujillo, Peru . (**CC BY SA 3.0**)*

Quichua people speak a language which is analogous to languages spoken in the Pacific and India. The Quichua Amerindians have an oral tradition which probably records the entrance of

the Axumites in ships made of reeds or "rushes" that landed on the Pacific coast at Santa Elena, close to Puerto Viejo. An oral tradition recorded by Don Cieza de Leon, a Spainish soldier-priest in 1545 AD says:

> *“These giants from the sea were so great in stature that from the knee down, they were as tall as a tall man. It was amazing to see how the hair hung from their great heads to their shoulders. Yet were they beardless. They ate [probably meant they fight] more than fifty ordinary men. There eyes were big as plates [como pequenos platos]. Their arms and legs were proportionately huge. Some were clad in skins of animals; others quite naked. No women came with them. Going inland they ravaged the country and finding no water, these builders in great stone set to and sank an immensely deep well in the living rock.... and today [in AD 1545] the water of this ancient well is so clear and cold and wholesome that it is a pleasure to drink it. This well made by the giants was lined with masonry, from top to bottom, and so well are these wells made that they will last for ages.”*

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Wilkins believes that these giants helped build Tiahuanaco. Commenting on the inhabitants of this ancient South American city he noted:

> *"They were a reddish-skinned race, though among them, as remarkable statuary, dug up from ruins shows, were also black men, with prognathic features. One splendid piece of terra cotta depicts in beautiful colors a high priest of the sun, with remarkably Egyptian eyes and having on his fine, large forehead a mitre and the sign of evolution, called by Bolivian archaeologists, el simbolo escalonado (the stairway sign)."*

*Tiahuanaco. (Daniel Maciel/ **CC BY 2.0**)*

These stories make it clear that the colonist-conquerors were taller than Amerinidians. They also detail how the newcomers built monuments out of solid rock. This architectural ability was a trademark of the Axumites. On the Mochica pottery these "giants" are depicted with black faces. At San Agustin, near the Colombian border, statues portray them with African features.

Mochica sculptures show people of marked racial variations: Some appear to be Africans, while others are American Indians. A well-known characteristic of the Andean people is the absence of heavy beards. Yet many Mochica sculptures show images of old men with long beards.

It is also interesting to note the Moche warriors and elite wore conical helmets like those of Meroitic elites - with a T-shaped ornament at the apex. Blacks are usually depicted wearing ornaments on their ears, lips, and nose as well.

*Mochica ceramics that may depict Africans. (**Public Domain**), (**Public Domain**) & (**Public Domain**)*

East Africans and the Huari Culture

Some of the Ethiopians that landed in Peru made their way inland. By 500 or 600 AD, other Axumites settled at the Marcahuasi plateau, East of Lima in the Western Cordilleras and began the Huari culture. The Huari were mainly African males. They expanded throughout southern Peru and established outposts and invented a well-organized administrative system.

At the Marcahuasi plateau we find monumental sculptures on the cliffs. A Huari monument hewed out of solid rock has sculptured heads of Africans, an ibex, a lion, elephants, frogs, camels and the goddess Tauerat, exactly like monuments discovered in Ethiopia at Angiarro (Wollo).

Large rock with the form of a human face, possibly a natural formation, Marcahuasi (***CC BY SA 3.0*** *)*

It is interesting to note that the tribes found in the vicinity of Huari monuments are called *Huanca* or *Huari*. This is almost the same sound as *Harari*, a name for one of the Semitic speaking tribes of Ethiopia. The forefathers of the Huari are only known from legend as a bearded people. Burland believes that the large ceremonial center of Tiahuanaco may have been the religious center of the Huari empire. Statues of Africans have been found in abundance at this site.

*Piquillacta - Huari archaeological site. (AgainErick/ **CC BY SA 3.0**)*

Epigraphic Evidence of Axumites in South America

There is also epigraphic evidence that supports the influence of Semitic speaking Ethiopians in South America – an inscription at the town of Palpa, some 20 kms (12.43 miles) north east of Nazca, Peru. It is an ancient pattern of lines that can be read using the Ge’ez language of Ethiopia.

Palpa Mountain inscription. (Author Provided)

This inscription says:

> *“Come down (into the earth) and spread this...Strain and pacify the water (in the area) Come and spread (within this region). Grace. Go out (among the land) and become strong”.*

The Nascodex organization refined my decipherment of this inscription as follows:

> *“Come, carve (dig) down into the earth, Pacify, control and increase the waters, Make them flow forth into the region, Gaining grace and favour, Go out among the people, become strong Leaders”.*

There is also epigraphic evidence for Axumites in Cuenca, Ecuador. Father Carlo Crespi collected numerous inscribed artifacts that local people claimed came from underground hiding places. Among these artifacts are 1) a gold sheet with a picture of a pyramid and Ethiopian letters at the foot of the pyramid; 2) a stone tablet with Ethiopian writing placed below three animals; and another with a stone pyramid with an elephant and sun symbol at the top of the pyramid and Ethiopian characters placed within the pyramid. Elephants and lions are rarely seen

in Egyptian art, but they are common in Meroitic and Axumite art. These tablets refer to various aspects of the life of a farmer-soldier (and traveler).

A gold sheet with a picture of a pyramid and Ethiopian letters at the foot of the pyramid. (Author provided)

The tablet (below) with the sun figure, which probably represents Zat-Baden or the Ethiopian sun-god, and an elephant, reference three things: a harp, beer/mead, and bread. These are associated with a man who is about to make a journey or go to work in the field in Tigrai.

The inscription on the stone tablet with a bull, an elephant, and an ibex probably refers to the warrior creed which may have existed among the Moche or Huari that once ruled this area. It uses pictograms to denote the role of the soldier.

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*The stone tablet with the sun figure, a pyramid, and an elephant. (**Solomons Blondes**)*

Although people came to early South America from East Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, Axumites probably influenced the elaborate stone monuments in Peru and Ecuador and introduced certain types of looms, writing, and medical techniques. East Africans also probably played an important role in the rise of the Moche empire.

*Top image: Representational image of African travelers. Source: **EgyptSearch.com***

By **Clyde Winters**

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PETE WAGNER WROTE ON 30 NOVEMBER, 2022 - 16:15

If the institution would get serious and honest with the genetic studies of the human bone fragments, we'd know a lot more about the races and ethnicities involved (to include hair and eye color), and the progression/timelines with respect to all the genetic mixing that certainly happened as a result of the migrations/invasions.

Nobody gets paid to tell the truth.

LAURELATHOME201 WROTE ON 23 SEPTEMBER, 2019 - 18:01

Pre-Columbus migrations to the Americas across both the Atlantic and Pacific are a no-brainer.

The elephant motif might originate with Mongols. When they conquered China they got access to the Chinese navy and used it to invade Japan. They had elephants on board because they were fascinated with elephants after a failed attempt to defeat a South Asian army mounted on elephants. History and legends indicate that Mongols were blown off course and wound up at the west coast of South America and became part of tribal legends shortly before Columbus. Spanish priests recorded the legends but then disappeared them.
Scandinavian explorer Thor Heyerdahl made successful trips to South America in replicas of two ancient boats. One was a round reed boat used by ancient Egyptians. The other is South Pacific islander and described in the book Kon Tiki. It's reasonable to think that Africans departed from both coats of Africa and island hopped to the Americas.

COLAS WROTE ON 11 APRIL, 2018 - 22:29

Thank you for this marvelous article. Some people will never understand but that is not your mission.

SHIVAM WROTE ON 7 DECEMBER, 2017 - 14:07

good

ALLEN SHAW WROTE ON 23 SEPTEMBER, 2017 - 05:04

Never say never! Much study - need to continue - Ocean and wind currents make trip possible!

Boats could have been destroyed over the many years. Do sculls have ears?

In an environment of learning keep an open mind.

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CLYDE WINTERS

Dr. Clyde Winters is an Educator , Anthropologist and Linguist. He has taught Education and Linguistics at Saint Xavier University -Chicago. Dr. Winters is the author of numerous articles on anthropology, archeogenetics and linguistics. His articles have appeared in the Journal... **Read More**

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UPDATED 23 JULY, 2014 - 01:41 DHWTY

Masyaf Castle, the Seat of the Assassins

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Fans of the popular video game series *Assassin's Creed* would be familiar with the castle of Masyaf in Syria. In the series, the castle of Masyaf was the headquarters of the notorious Assassins, and this is not fiction - Masyaf was indeed once home to the much feared **ancient order of assassins** .

During the late 11th century, an order of Nizari Ismailies was formed in Persia and Syria by a man called Hassan-i Sabbah. These were the notorious Hashshashins who captured many mountain fortresses and posed a threat to Sunni Seljuk authority in Persia. Perhaps the Hashshashin, from which the name 'assassins' derives, were most famous for the way they got rid of their opponents – through highly-skilled assassinations.

Based on archaeological evidence, it has been suggested that the castle of Masyaf was built during the time of the Byzantines, constructed on top of a natural limestone hill that rose above the surrounding plain and village. This gave the castle a strategic position which allowed its occupants to oversee and control the region. The Assassins first occupied the castle in A.D. 1141 when they captured it from the Sanqur, who held it for the Banu Munqidh of Shayzar, one of the petty Islamic dynasties in the region during the 12 th century A.D.

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The castle of Masyaf as it stands today. Source: Wikipedia

The Assassins were notorious throughout the region for their efficiency at dispatching their enemies. This gave them a degree of political power that some of the bigger powers in the Middle East were not comfortable with. Thus, Masyaf became a target for those who were brave enough to make an attempt at breaking the power of the Assassins. This endeavour was undertaken by no less an illustrious character as Saladin, the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty.

Saladin's siege of the castle in 1176 A.D., however, ended in failure. According to legend, while Saladin was asleep beneath Masyaf, an Assassin managed to infiltrate his tent. Saladin awoke to catch a glimpse of this figure as he was leaving the tent. A poisoned cake or hot scones with a poisoned dagger were left on the side of Saladin's bed. This pastry was accompanied by a note warning Saladin that he would be killed if he did not withdraw. Fearing for his life, Saladin chose to make peace with the Assassins.

*'Saladin the Great' by **DanarArt***

Nevertheless, the Assassins were not invincible. In 1260 A.D., Masyaf and three other Assassin fortresses surrendered to the invading Mongols. The Mongol victory was short-lived, however, as they were defeated by the Mamelukes at the Battle of 'Ayn Jalut in the same year. Once the Mongols were expelled from Syria, the Assassins were back in control of Masyaf. Ten years later, the Mamelukes under their sultan, Baibars, took control of Masyaf. Whilst the Assassins eventually disbanded, the castle remained a part of the landscape.

In 2000, conservation work began on the castle of Masyaf. This project, completed in 2006, has consolidated and restored the crumbling structure. Moreover, it has provided us with a much better understanding of the Assassins when they occupied the castle. For instance, the

project discovered a tunnel that is believed to have been a secret escape passage. In addition, a system of channels designed to carry rain water into cisterns beneath the castle was also uncovered. This is further evidence that the castle was designed to withstand long periods of enemy siege. Yet, the castle is not without its luxuries, as attested by the finding of a traditional bath house.

*Tunnel inside Masyaf Castle. Image source: **TripAdvisor***

It may be worth pointing out that the castle of Masyaf does not exist as an isolated point in the landscape, but co-exists with the neighbouring old city of Masyaf. Thus, the conservators, who took into account the urban context of the castle, made an effort to conserve and enhance the old city, upgraded the markets and pedestrian areas and created more attractive facilities for tourists. By taking these measures, the local population would benefit from the tourism industry, and would probably work to preserve the castle, as they have a stake in it. Thus, by involving the local population, such ancient monuments may be protected for future generations to come.

*Featured image: 'Masyaf' by **Raphael-Lacoste***

By **Ḏḥwty**

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MICHAEL STONES WROTE ON 31 MAY, 2017 - 08:41
Well I believe there wouldn't be any or as many if America (and the West) had stayed out of their countries and not raped murdered their women and children and and pillaged the natural resources

TSURUGI WROTE ON 31 MAY, 2017 - 01:25
No I'm pretty sure it's Islamic hardliners actually.

MICHAEL STONES WROTE ON 15 MARCH, 2017 - 10:34
And you can thank the number one terrorist regime (USA) for that

TSURUGI WROTE ON 24 JULY, 2014 - 03:22
Fascinating. I love the Assassin's Creed games, it's good to see old Masyaf getting fixed up. Involving the locals is brilliant, I hope it works. The problem is, there aren't a lot of tourists willing to go to Syria right now.

Ancient Origins has been quoted by:

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC · Smithsonian · HISTORY · theguardian · CNN · FOX NEWS · THE TIMES · DER SPIEGEL · The New York Times · The Washington Post · Daily Mail

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Greek Mythology

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- Greece's East Attica In Antiquity: Playground Of Gods, Heroes And Heroines
- Mother and Child Reunion Of Thetis And Achilles
- Seductive Sirens of Greek Mythology and How Heroes Resisted Them
- Celestial Goddess Selene: The Ancient Greek Goddess of the

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Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher, teacher, and political figure, is one of the most influential thinkers in human history.

- Did Nero Really Fiddle While Rome Burned?
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Mysterious Lake Monster Causes Underwater Eruption (Video)

In June 2017, kayakers in Washington encounter a strange occurrence on Yale Lake.

- Tracing the Unknown Origins of the Enigmatic Nomoli Figures
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- The Haunted Plague Island of Poveglia: A Dark and Twisted Past
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- Pegasus of Greek Mythology: Majestic Winged Horse of Mount Olympus

- 10 Formidable Monarchs Who Ruled Vast Empires in Ancient Asia

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- Archaeology Enigmas: Four Mystery Doors That Should Never be Opened (Video)

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Humans Have Been Keeping Dildos Handy for at Least 28,000 Years

When archaeologists assembled the pieces of an ancient stone artifact discovered in a cave in Germany, it was pretty clear what they'd found.

- Medieval Living: How Did Medieval Peasants Light Their Homes? (Video)
- Why Mount Sinai is in Egypt and Other Exodus Enigmas
- How Egypt's Stone Carvers Keep Their Ancestor's Traditions Alive (Video)
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Who Mined Lake Superior? Ancient Glyphs Solve Bronze Age Mystery (Video)

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- Thoth's Storm: New Evidence for Ancient Egyptians in Ireland?
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ANCIENT PLACES

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MYTHS & LEGENDS

Cernunnos - The Enigmatic Antlered God of the Ancient Celts

The Celts can rightfully be placed amongst the world's most important ancient cultures and civilizations. Their far-reaching ancient origins are the irreplaceable part of every historical lesson, and...

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- Exploring the City of Caesars: Patagonia's Legendary Lost City

ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY

Top 5 Ancient Greek Inventions We Still Use Today

Humanity has come a long way when it comes to crafty inventions, but some of the earliest innovative minds were the ancient Greeks.

- 7 Amazing Ancient Technologies Too Advanced for Their Time (Video)
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OPINION

The Truth Behind the Christ Myth: Ancient Origins of the Often Used Legend – Part I

What is the origin of the legend of the Christed Son who was born of a virgin on December 25th? I am sure you are familiar with his legend which states that he was born in a manger surrounded by shepherds

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- Curse of the Buried Pearl: The Hunt for Ancient Treasures – Part I
- The Enigma of the Shugborough Inscription

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The goal of Ancient Origins is to highlight recent archaeological discoveries, peer-reviewed academic research and evidence, as well as offering alternative viewpoints and explanations of science, archaeology, mythology, religion and history around the globe.

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By bringing together top experts and authors, this archaeology website explores lost civilizations, examines sacred writings, tours ancient places, investigates ancient discoveries and questions mysterious happenings. Our open community is dedicated to digging into the origins of our species on planet earth, and question wherever the discoveries might take us. We seek to retell the story of our

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UPDATED 7 MAY, 2020 - 14:03 ED WHELAN

Alba Fucens, a City Not Even the Roman Gods Could Protect

READ LATER PRINT

Italy is visited by millions of tourists each year for its many remarkable ancient ruins, fascinating heritage sites, incredible food, and beautiful countryside. Because there is such an abundance of historical locations to visit, many sites are not as well known. One of these is Alba Fucens, which contains some of the finest early Roman ruins in Italy. This once a bustling town at the foot of Monte Velino was largely destroyed by marauding pirates in the Middle Ages .

The History of Alba Fucens

The town which once stood on this site was ancient. It was founded by the Aequi, a tribe who lived in the area before the establishment of Rome. They were a hardy mountain people and were among the most implacable foe of the Early Roman Republic .

Alba Fucens, originally a hillfort, was finally conquered in the Third Samnite War (298 to 290 BC). The area was occupied by the Romans who sent citizens to colonize the town, although the Aequi were given many rights. During the Second Punic War (218 to 201 BC), the city refused to send soldiers to help in the war against Hannibal and it appears that the population of the town was punished.

GREEK MYTHOLOGY

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

ANCIENT EGYPT

SUGGESTED BOOKS

The location of Alba Fucens, central Italy, Europe (Google Maps)

Alba Fucens prospered during the Social War (91 to 88 BC), when many Italian allies revolted against Roman rule since they stayed loyal. By this time the town was losing its **Aequi culture** and was increasingly Latin in culture and language.

As Alba Fucens was located in a very strategic position, it was fought over during the many civil wars. These eventually led to the fall of the Roman Republic in the First Century BC. Reports in primary sources state that the hill-top town was used to hold captured **foreign kings** .

Based on archaeological evidence found at the site, Alba Fucens prospered in the Imperial period (27 BC to 476 AD). Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the town became part of the Ostrogothic and Lombard kingdoms.

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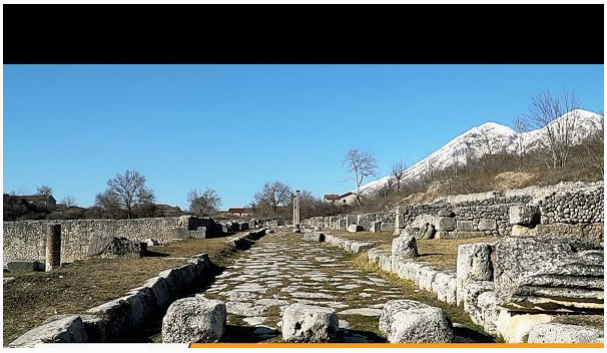

From the 9 th century AD, Arab pirates and raiders, known as the Saracens, were ravaging the coasts of Italy and conquering territories. As they became more brazen, they ventured inland. In the 10 th century they attacked Alba Fucens, destroyed it, and **enslaved** much of the population. The town was almost completely depopulated and entered into a period of decline.

What Archaeology Tells US About Pre-Roman Cultures

Have We Got a Temple, Theater, and Gate? Check! New Details Emerge on Roman Urban Planning in Central Italy

Researchers Discover Gladiator Fans Had Souvenirs, Fast Food, and Fresh-Baked Treats at Their Fingertips

Illustration by David Aubert, Maugis fighting the Saracens in Aigremont, 15 th century (**Public Domain**)

Alba Fucens was completely abandoned when the survivors established the nearby town of Massa d'Albe. Belgian archaeologists investigated in the mid-20 th century and did much to conserve the ruins.

The Remains of the Once Prosperous Alba Fucens

The abandoned town is located in Abruzzo, Central Italy, in a mountainous region with many historic sites. Despite its sack by the **Saracens** there are still spectacular ruins to be seen. The remaining town walls, roughly 2 miles (3.2km) long, encircle the site and are among the best-preserved in all of Italy.

According to inscriptions, the amphitheater was built by the Praetorian prefect Naevius Macro. The **circular structure** , with tiers of seats encircling an open space, afforded the crowd a great view of the games held here. The remains of this once popular venue and its original entrance stand as a testament to the durability of Roman construction.

The town of Alba Fucens, Abruzzo, Italy (**ValerioMei** / Adobe Stock)

The foundations of many private and public buildings are still visible, including Alba Fucens' original market and the columns located in this area. The thermal spa is very impressive with its mosaics, and what would an ancient Roman city be without its shrines, these one dedicated to **Hercules**, Isis and Apollo. Or a partly standing Roman wine bar, sadly no longer trading. Studies have shown that their sewage system was unique and one of the most sophisticated ever found from the Roman period.

On the hill above the abandoned town stands the Church of San Pietro which has an interesting blend of Romanesque and Byzantine motifs and designs and dates back to the 12th Century. Stones and columns from the **Temple of Apollo** were used in its construction. San Pietro's apse is much admired as are several mosaics in the church. From this higher vantage point, ancient page shrine and remining stones that once belonged to the Temple of Apollo are visible. A castle ruined in the 15 th century during the French invasion of Italy is close to Mount Velino.

Roman road through Alba Fucens with ruins and original wall (**e55evu**/ Adobe Stock)

How to see Alba Fucens

Alba Fucens is in Abruzzo, approximately 50 miles east of Rome. The site is not far from the town of Massa d'Albe and there is a car park adjacent to the site. Admittance is free.

Top image: Alba Fucens, Roman archaeological site with amphitheater. Monte Velino mountain with snow, Abruzzo region, central Italy

Source: **ValerioMei** / Adobe Stock

By **Ed Whelan**

Galadini, F., Ceccaroni, E., & Falcucci, E. (2010). *Archaeoseismological evidence of a disruptive Late Antique earthquake at Alba Fucens* . Bollettino di Geofisica Teorica ed Applicata, 51

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Potter, T. W. (2016). *Alba Fucens* . In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics

Available at: **https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-239#acrefore-9780199381135-e-239**

Section: News | Ancient Places | Europe

Tags: Alba Fucens | Aequi | Early Rome | marauders | Destruction | amphitheater | temple | Monte Velino | central Italy

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PETE WAGNER WROTE ON 4 NOVEMBER, 2022 - 13:45

Like many, if not most ancient stone-built sites all around the Med, if there are no texts of the era describing their construction, the laborious quarrying, moving and erecting of the stones, which doesn't happen 'in a day', we should assume these were aboriginal complexes built prior to the Ice Age. I.e., by the fair-haired Atlantean-era people, whose culture was destroyed in the event that caused the Ice Age. Otherwise, it just doesn't add up.

Nobody gets paid to tell the truth.

TODA WROTE ON 2 FEBRUARY, 2021 - 23:52

Thanks for your article! It is so nice to see reviewed some of the least famous (but still amazing) historical places of my country.

Alba Fucens is an incredible place where we find the finest ancient and medieval architecture was made. Great works, not inferior for charm and beauty to more famous gems of the country, Alba Fucens really stands out of the average. It is also quit far inland, sitting on mountain highlands with amazing views.

Megalithic walls are just everywhere, here! The kilometric surrounding wall is such, there are three false doors as well, fit in a polygonal segment within the urban area. Recently, a pristine megalithic tunnel, featuring a neat polygonal masonry just as outside, was found and further work is going to follow.

You really hit the place to visit!

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Alexander's Legacy: The Hellenistic Period and the Dawn of a New Era

The Hellenistic period was a time of great change and excitement in the ancient world.

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Classical wrestling has its roots hidden far back in the history of the world.

We think we're the first advanced earthlings - but how do we really know?

Imagine if, many millions of years ago, dinosaurs drove cars through cities of mile-high buildings. A preposterous idea, right? Over the course of tens of millions of years, however, all of the direct evidence of a civilization -- its artifacts and remains -- gets ground to dust.

Enormous Underwater Structure in the Sea of Galilee is a Mystery to Archaeologists

A gigantic monument at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, as well as several mysterious structures, including a gigantic stone wheel and a moon-shaped monument, were recently found in northern Israel...

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- What Happened to the Sunken City of Cuba?
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MYTHS & LEGENDS

ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY

OPINION

Eight of the Most Powerful Mythical Objects in History

Myths and legends abound with exciting tales of mystical objects and powerful artifacts that unlock great power and unimaginable treasures.

The Evidence is Cut in Stone: A Compelling Argument for Lost High Technology in Ancient Egypt

Most people know of the great construction achievements of the dynastic Egyptians such as the pyramids and temples of the Giza Plateau area as well as the Sphinx. Many books and videos show depictions of vast work forces hewing blocks of stone in the hot desert sun and carefully setting them into place.

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What is the origin of the legend of the Christed Son who was born of a virgin on December 25th? I am sure you are familiar with his legend which states that he was born in a manger surrounded by shepherds

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- The Chilling Messages Encoded in Egyptian Tombs (Video)
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- Two Sides to Every Story: The North American Martyrs Shrines and Indigenous/ Roman Catholic Relations
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UPDATED 5 AUGUST, 2017 - 19:00 APRILHOLLOWAY

The Controversial Indian Caste System Has Been Dividing India for 2000 Years

READ LATER PRINT

A study of genetic populations in India suggests the Indian caste system, a traditional method of social organization into a hierarchy of hereditary groups, has been prevalent in the South Asian society for about 2000 years.

As an overview: the caste system is based on Hindu religious principles and dictates how different groups of people can interact. This hierarchical organization of society only permits marriage within the same caste and dictates that a caste is fixed from birth. Moreover, each caste is linked to a traditional occupation.

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- Gabon: The Home of Ancient Nuclear Reactors
- Aztec Weapons: The Horrifying Aztec Armory

A 1922 stereograph of Hindu children of high caste, Bombay, India. (Public Domain)

Live Science reported that researchers analyzed the DNA of 371 people from 73 groups and reported their findings in the American Journal of Human Genetics . The researchers discovered that different populations began to intermix in India about 4200 years ago, but stopped intermingling approximately 1900 years ago. These results were supported by clues found in ancient texts which suggest class distinctions have existed since about 3000-3500 years ago. Caste divisions became strong approximately two millennia ago.

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SUGGESTED BOOKS

*An 1860s photograph of Rajputs, classified as a high Hindu caste. (**Public Domain**)*

Three principal groups of people – priests, nobility, and common people – were identified in the 3500-year-old collection of Sanskrit hymns known as the Rigveda. This source doesn't mention segregation or restrictions on employment areas at that time. A fourth group, called the Shudra (the lowest class), was mentioned by 1000 BC. Nonetheless, it wasn't until 100 BC that the holy text Manusmruti mentioned direct prohibition of marriages across castes. This restriction reflects the results of the genetic analysis.

Study co-author Priya Moorjani, a geneticist at Harvard University, **explained** that although relationships across castes was once common, a "transformation where most groups now practice endogamy [where people marry within their own group]" occurred about 2000 years ago.

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The caste system is linked to a Hindu belief in the four varnas - ordering and ranking people by their "innate" spiritual purity. At the highest position are the priests, Brahmins. The warriors, Kshatriyas, are next and the Vaishyas, merchants, follow them. The lowest caste belongs to Shurdas (laborers, artisans, and servants doing ritually "unclean" work.) The Shudra caste was once known as the "untouchables" and they were heavily discriminated against – being unable to drink from wells used by higher castes, participate in religious rituals, or even have their shadows fall on Brahmins.

*Pyramid of Caste system in India. (**CC BY SA 3.0**)*

By the early 20th century India was on its way to independence from the British and the caste system became very controversial. It has been criticized as unfair and discriminatory. Now, the Indian constitution prohibits the use of "untouchable" to describe members of the Shudra caste or discrimination based on caste. With the increase of the information age, the caste system has lost much of its economic importance. However, it remains important to religious practices and continues to be a divisive area of life in India today.

*Gandhi visiting Madras (now Chennai) in 1933 on an India-wide tour for Harijan causes. His speeches and writings during these tours discussed the discriminated castes of India. (**Public Domain**)*

*Top Image: Images from the manuscript 'Seventy-Two Specimens of Castes in India.' (**Public Domain** & **Public Domain**)*

By **April Holloway**

Section: News | History | Ancient Traditions

Tags: hindu | hierarchy | caste | Social | India | Genetics

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BLOCKED-USER-346 WROTE ON 8 JANUARY, 2022 - 15:23

Genesis, which is the story of the Sumerians, the self-described "black-headed people" who came to Earth from another planet, tells us that 'their god' created man, ...but of course there were other men here when they landed, those having survived their global assault that rendered ruin to the surface and created the long Ice Age/nuclear winter. The progenitors of the Sumerian lineage, i.e., Persians and other black-haired races, do not have a history of seeing people as equals, particularly with regard to skin color. But the aboriginal Earth people, those who survived the Ice Age and still somewhat thrive, do have a more moral sense of equality and justice, and bear a different facial appearance – nose points up (not down), finer and fair colored hair, and lighter skin color. The irony is that the black-headed stock of people, to this day, see their own god's creation, from their Genesis story, as not as good as the people who were here before they came. The exception, of course, are those who hang onto a believe that their genetics are special, coming directly from the Noah lineage (via mitochondria DNA of just the four women), and as such have some strange, delusional belief, mission or destiny to rule every inch of the planet – primarily now via the trick known as money, one can assume as conquistadors of sorts, but sometimes called Zionism or other ism.

Nobody gets paid to tell the truth.

PETER RAVENSCROFT WROTE ON 9 AUGUST, 2017 - 04:30

G'day April et al.,

An amazing site, thanks on behalf of one and all.

I have been reading up on many of the topics you cover for decades, but in every case you have had new info and insights.

Will ramble a bit, next.

Have you ever compared the step pyramids of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Central and South America. They are so close they had to have the same original architect. I think the intro to the Americas was about 2,000 BC, with the vessels going, well, which way? Benin warriors later crossed, an easy trip for big sailing canoes, see the Olmec statues, but there is also a very close match in dress styles, between the people of Nepal and Tibet, and those of the Peruvian mountains. I once experienced the hospitality of a family of Pyallup Indians, when hitching past Tacoma, and they said, they have been offering such hospitality for a very long time. It was, I took it, a very serious statement. Most human exploration has been by canoe, as those, for crossing rivers, are simply logs with some branches knocked off, so Homo erectus had the tools and the need. I have watched a fox use a log in a river to cross it, here in Oz. Trees being undercut and falling into and across rivers explains back a fair bit further, to the brontosaurus - a canoe, with flippers to haul it over obstructing trees blocking rivers, and a long tail to balance the long neck it had for getting deeper and deeper river mussels. So there were always logs for riverine monkeys.

We westerners are newcomers to exploration, as the Negritos extend from the tip of South America to the Andamans, to Tasmania. Their oldest legends say they knew Australia was here, because the birds told the. Huge flocks, going south, with their needs well understood.

VIRAL ARTICLES

Legends | Technology | Ancient Places

Maya: Science Only Acknowledges Now What Ancient Sages Knew About Reality 5000 Years Ago
Maya is a word which is very familiar to the western world, but very few know what it actually means. It is a word which was used by the rishis (sages) of ancient India to describe the nature of this universe of changing forms. The rishis have always been telling us that matter is not as real or as solid as we think. It is only an illusion projected by our senses.

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UPDATED 20 MAY, 2017 - 13:58 CALUMY

The Macabre Mystery of the Missing Prince And 'Zombie' King

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In "The Mysterious Death of Tutankhamun", by Paul Doherty he remarks, "There is a passivity about Tutankhamun which is quite chilling." Normally the text in the tombs of other Kings read in the present or future tenses, but as Doherty comments, "The inscriptions about Tutankhamun are always passive, in the main in the third person..."

Unique Aspects of Tutankhamun's Tomb

There is yet more that is quite extraordinary. The important ritual of 'the Opening of the Mouth' was normally carried out by his successor who was never crowned until the required seventy days had passed after the late King's tomb had been sealed. There is a scene in Tutankhamen's tomb showing Ay carrying out the ceremony while already wearing the Crown of a King. The only reasonable answer is that the King had been dead for a long period and was sealed in an earlier tomb. There is every sign that the tomb and coffins were prepared in a great hurry, and that the latter had been moved from a larger tomb.

Ay performing the opening of the mouth ceremony. Wall painting from Tutankhamun's tomb (KV 62) . (Public Domain)

The eldest Prince and heir to the throne of Egypt after YmnHtp III was TwtMs which means 'Born of the God TWT'. As we have learned from historian Ahmed Osman 'TWT' was Egyptian for the Hebrew 'DWD', in English, DAVID.

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His tomb has been found, but it was empty, and from all appearances, though made ready, it was never used. Nor were the final touches showing his funeral and mummification added to the walls. Had he not died so young he would have become the next King of Egypt after SalimAmen III/YmnHtpIII and so named YmnTwtAnkh, 'The Living Gods Amen and David'. But hold on a minute, for that is the very name given to the young king found in 1922 by Howard Carter.

PARTNERS

*Howard Carter (kneeling), an Egyptian workman, and Arthur Callender at doors of burial shrines in Pharaoh Tutankhamen's tomb. (**Public Domain**)*

Examining the Familial Lineage

The Ethiopian Kebra Nagast tells us that Menyelek was also named David and that he was the eldest son of King Solomon. We know that Menyelek was YmnTwtAnkh because it is the same name. Twt or David was a Moon God and the Semite equivalent was another Moon God, EL (sometimes known as Iah, Yah or Lah). Ethiopians regarded Prince TwtMs as one of theirs for legend has it that Solomon married a girl from Abyssinia named Etiye Azeb. This has to be correct for the favorite Queen of Ymn Htp III was indeed called 'Etiye' and so must have been Queen Zeba or **Sheba** (the south-west).

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Since Prince TwtMs died in his late teens or early twenties his younger brother assumed the throne alongside their father. Then after Amenhotep III died that brother changed his name from YmnHtp to Akhenaten.

When Akhenaten began to close all temples devoted to the God Ymn – Amen, and tried to change belief to a new unseen God called 'The Aten', the repercussions must have been enormous. Opposition drove him out of the capital city, Uaset, and so he built a new City that he named Akhetaten. We do know that something affected him intensely as proclamations found in the ruins of Akhetaten mention a great evil, greater than any others he had heard.

*Panel with scene of Akhenaten and his family adoring the Aten (detail). (**Public Domain**)*

Bringing the Dead Back to Life

With Akhenaten gone from Uaset, the old establishment and priests of Amen saw an opportunity to reinstate the ancient and most popular belief in Amen. Led by Ay and the General Horemheb they sought some way of ridding Egypt of a hated King who had worked thousands of his followers to their deaths. The problem was that the people believed religiously in the right of the eldest living heir to be their king. There could only be one way to replace a King of Egypt. They had to somehow show the people that the older brother had come back to life. After all, they believed that their Kings would rise again, hence the long mummification rituals.

This might well be the terrible evil that Akhenaten referred to in his proclamations. It would also explain his assertion that he was the true king.

*Anubis, supervisor of the mummification process. Underneath the lion bed are the four canopic vases, for the organs that were mummified separately. (**CC BY SA 2.0**)*

We should now look at the messages left in the Tomb of YmnTwtAnkh which leave no doubt at all to his true identity as the Missing Prince TwtMs.

Egyptologists often maintain that the tomb was filled hurriedly with personal items belonging to other people. What they fail to add is that these articles were once owned by TwtMs and that the deceased needed their own familiar possessions to take with them in the after-life.

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A whip has the name of TwtMs on the handle. TwtMs had been a Priest in Memphis and the robes were his. A lock of hair from his mother Etiye was in a cofinette, thus adding to the evidence that he was not the son of Akhenaten. TwtMs did go on a campaign against Nubians and the chest in the King's tomb depicts a scene from that battle.

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*The Pharaoh Tutankhamun destroying his enemies. Painting on wood. Egyptian Museum of Cairo. (**Public Domain**)*

Deciphering the Messages Left Behind

There are also no less than four memorials which all tell us that YmnTwtAnkh was the eldest son of Amenhotep III. Yes, there have been claims that DNA proves that he was the son of Akhenaten which is quite amazing, since his mummy has never been found and identified. At the same time, we have good evidence in the Copper Scroll of Qumran that Akhenaten was the Biblical Moses.

In any case, it is the extensive analysis by Kate Phizakerley that indicates that Akhenaten could not have been the father of YmnTwtAnkh - **http://www.kv64.info/2010/03/dna-shows-that-kv55-mummy-probably-not.html**. Why too have the DNA results from the 18th Dynasty mummies been locked away and nobody allowed access to them? What are Egyptian Antiquities trying to hide?

The loudest message of all left in the young King's tomb is on the back of his chair. Not only are the names of the Prince TWT MS and the King YMN ANKH TWT both there but his identity as Prince is inscribed in very large hieroglyphs as is the sign of the Ankh hanging from his arm, shouting out that he is alive.

Note the sign of the Ankh hanging from his arm, shouting out that he is alive. (Author provided)

Kings' names were written in what we now call a cartouche. Surprisingly on the chair it is much smaller than his Princely name TWT MS framed in rectangles on both side of his royal figure which are double the size of the cartouche. Whoever designed the chair was leaving no doubt that the two were one and the same and that it was important that anyone in the future seeing inside his tomb would know that this was TWTMS the eldest son of Solomon.

Cartouches on the chair. (Author provided)

At the far sides, left and right, he is holding a long Crook they called 'Hek', Hyksos in Greek, which signified rule over Sheep - a name used in the bible for the Hebrew people of Egypt who recognized the dominant constellation as being Aries. Those Egyptians who still recognized the previous constellation of Taurus as being the Manger where their Son of God was born were the cattle. That is why a number of Pharaohs are shown holding a Crook over one shoulder and a Cattle Flail over the other, showing their position as ruler of both people.

The Chair also depicts two Oxen meaning Victorious and two Arms each holding a Stick meaning powerful (or in Action and Violent). These speak more of the Prince who did fight the Nubians than the picture we have of a meek and physically feeble king.

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Wooden bust of the boy king, found in his tomb. (Jon Bodsworth)

Other hieroglyphs on the chair stress his being King of the Two Lands and that he was Eternal and a Giver of Life.

This chair and a Stone Ankh which also links the names of the Missing Prince with that of King Tutankhamen can only mean that they were one and the same person. The year of his accession as King was also significant for 1321 BC was a date that the King Born of the God Yah or Iah (MS IAH in Egyptian) was expected to return. This only happened once every 1,460 years when the Annual Heliacal Rising of Sirius coincided with the northern hemisphere summer solstice. The next time wouldn't occur until 139 AD during the Age of Pisces, The Fisherman, which is why the three Wise Kings portrayed in a scene in Solomon's Temple in Luxor were brought back into the latest version of the story that we are more familiar with.

Just how long the Priests of Amen and Ay maintained the pretense of a resurrected Prince who was now the rightful King of Egypt can only be guessed at. The damage done to his mummified remains might well have occurred when they propped the body up on some form of Sedan Chair and paraded it in public for all to view in religious processional ceremonies.

Top Image: Anubis Reconstructing Osiris (1350 BC, Tomb of Ramses 1, Egypt). Source: Asaf Braverman/ CC BY NC SA 2.0

By Malcolm Hutton

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UPDATED 4 JANUARY, 2023 - 21:56 ROBBIE MITCHELL

The Stories Behind Seven of the Worst Massacres in Ancient History

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We all know that the ancient world was a violent place, but we often don't appreciate just how violent it was. The world was in a near-constant state of bloodshed and warfare. Massacres and mass slaughter were practically a part of daily life. The numbers killed in these ancient conflicts, and the reasons given for them, can boggle the mind. Here are seven of the worst massacres carried out in ancient history.

1. The Extermination of the Jie and Wu Hu in Ancient China

In fourth-century AD China, a war broke out when the Jie and Wu Hu peoples rebelled against the rule of General Ran Min. The war did not go well for the Jie or Wu Hu, and Ran Min ensured an example was made of them.

Things came to a head with Ran Min's victory at the Battle of Xiangguo. At the beginning of the war, Ran Min had ordered that all Jie people be exterminated. For attempting to help the Jie, the Wu Hu were given the same fate. Ran Min declared that all Jie and Wu Hu must be killed indiscriminately, regardless of they were male, female, young, or old.

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Following their victory at Xiangguo, Ran Min's army swept into Jie and Wu Hu lands, carrying out Ran Mins's terrible order. Farms, villages, and entire towns were raided and put to death. Wu Hu and Jie refugees fled to the larger cities, hoping to hide in the crowds. Citizens loyal to Ran Min delighted in hunting down those refugees and murdering them.

Ultimately, many of the Wu Hu fled to Mongolia and the far corners of Asia where they were safe. Still, estimates put the Wu Hu death toll at around 100,000. The Jie fared even worse. They faced almost total genocide and were virtually wiped out. During the war and the ensuing massacres that followed, at least 200,000 Jie were butchered. The corpses were rounded up and dumped in mass graves.

Ran Min was overjoyed. He declared the total eradication of the Jie people. Subsequent Chinese history suggests this may have been premature. Later sources contain references that hint some Jie may have somehow managed to survive the genocide. Survivors or not, this was one of the worst massacres in history.

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- Archaeologists Discover Tollense Battle Was Actually A Massacre

General Ran Min's genocide of the Wu Hu and Jie peoples in the fourth century was nearly complete (Public Domain)

2. The Thessalonica Massacre: From Sodomy to Bloodshed

There is a common misconception that the ancient Greeks and Romans were fine with homosexuality. This is not accurate . There were strict societal rules in place regarding sodomy, and dire consequences for those who broke them.

In 390 AD, the magistrate of Illyricum, an area including Thessalonica, had a local celebrity arrested. His crime? An alleged act of sodomy with another high-ranking man.

It was clearly a political move and the public was outraged. They demanded the men be released. The magistrate, Butheric, stuck to his guns and refused. The public responded by protesting. The protests in Thessalonica turned into riots, and the riots turned into anarchy. In the ensuing chaos, Butheric and several other Roman officials in the city and neighboring regions were killed by the mob.

The news quickly reached the ears of the Roman Emperor Theodosius I . The Romans could not afford to let any kind of unrest, let alone the murder of government representatives, go unpunished. The emperor ordered that troops be dispatched immediately with orders to deal with these rebels harshly.

Harshly may be an understatement. His original order was to treat everyone within the city as if they were guilty. No one was to be spared. Every man, woman, and child was to be executed without exception.

Theodosius quickly second-guessed himself, realizing that he may have gone a little overboard. As his troops approached the city, he sent a messenger to head them off. His new orders were to arrest the ringleaders but to leave the citizens alone. He was too late.

By the time his messenger had entered the city, it was all for naught. The troops had gone in and carried out their original orders. Several thousand innocent people had been slaughtered in the name of the Roman emperor. Church officials were outraged by the massacre. Theodosius was banned from entering any Christian church until he agreed to make changes to Roman law that would prevent a repeat of the massacre.

Theodosius consented and brought in a new law that anyone sentenced to death be granted 30 days before their execution. Historians believe around 7,000 people were massacred in Thessalonica.

- **Prehistoric Spanish Massacre Rewrites the History of War in Europe**
- **6,200-Year-Old Croatian Massacre Solved With Genetic DNA Study**

*Anthonis Van Dyke's 1619 painting of St. Ambrose blocking the cathedral door, refusing Theodosius' admittance. Saint Ambrose barring Theodosius from Milan Cathedral (**Public Domain**)*

3. The Massacre of the Zoroastrians at Istakhr

Istakhr was an ancient Persian city that thrived during the **Achaemenid Persian Empire** of 550-330 BC. Located in what is modern-day Iran, it emerged at the end of a caravan road that connected to the city of Persepolis and the wealthy Indus Valley. Istakhr thrived as a trade hub, for a while.

In 649 AD, Muslim Arabs invaded and took control of the city. The city's new rulers brought in strict new rules. These included the repression of **Zoroastrianism**, a peaceful local religion, and support of Islam. For two years, the people of the city suffered under Arab rule and persecution. Eventually, enough was enough, and they revolted. This Persian rebellion did not go to plan.

The Arabs swiftly and brutally put down the revolt. They decided to make an example out of the city's population. More Muslim settlers were brought into the city to replace the original Persian population. The Persians were massacred. For daring to revolt, over 150,000 Persian

civilians were rounded up and executed. Many of them had played little to no part in the brief rebellion.

*A drawing from the ruins of Istakhr in the 19th century (**Public Domain**)*

4. The Extermination of the Druids in Britannia

By the middle of the first century AD, the Romans were pretty well established in what is now the United Kingdom, but not everything was going to plan. In particular, the Welsh tribes had proven themselves to be a nuisance, difficult to put down. Roman patrols and trade caravans were constantly being attacked by small bands. The Romans couldn't afford to put up with any kind of native rebellion. The Roman leader in Britannia, Suetonius Paulinus soon had enough of these guerilla tactics. An example had to be made.

He sent his troops to the island of Mona, which is called Anglesey today. This island was the sacred home of the **Druids**, as well as several Welsh tribes. The Romans set about making sure the Druids would become a thing of history.

Men, women, and children were put to the sword by Roman infantry and cavalry. Their corpses were dumped on vast bonfires. The slaughter began with the Welsh tribesmen who had set out to protect their families and holy men. While they had previously been successful as guerillas, they didn't survive long in open combat against the highly trained and disciplined Roman legions.

After the tribesmen had been dealt with, the troops turned their attention to the peaceful Druids. The Druids had put up no fight, but the Romans were a superstitious lot. They feared the Druid's pagan beliefs and thought it better to **slaughter them** , just in case.

After all the Druids were dead, the Romans set about destroying any trace that they had ever existed. A garrison was built on the remains to deter any future rebellion from the surviving locals.

*Detail of illustration showing Roman soldiers' massacres of the Anglesey Druids, as described by Tacitus. (**Public Domain**)*

5. The Male-Only Massacre of Hysiae

The **Peloponnesian War** of 431-404 BC between the Athenians and the Spartans was a nasty one, full of bloody battles. One such battle was the Battle of **Hysiae**, fought between the armies of Sparta and Argos in 417 BC.

The Athenians had been determined to establish a democratic government just like their own in Argos. The Spartans invaded Argos after some of their supporters had been evicted from Argive territory. The Spartans, led by King Agis II, did not manage to take the city, but they did manage to take a nearby fortress city, Hysiae.

Agis II still had his sights set on Argos. He ordered that the male population of Hysiae be rounded up and taken hostage. If the Athenians agreed to hand over Argos, he would spare his hostages. He presumed the civilized Athenians would have no choice but to agree.

Unfortunately, the Athenians were more stubborn than Agis had accounted for. He was left in an awkward position. The Athenians refused to back down, and they had fortified Argos to a degree that he stood no hope of taking the city by force. At the same time, he had saddled himself with thousands of hostages who were eating up his supplies.

Agis decided he had only one choice, to withdraw from the area. The problem was, if he allowed the hostages to live, he would look weak. The Athenians would have called his bluff. So Agis ordered that his hostages be executed. Every male resident of Hysiae, no matter their age, was massacred. The exact number of deaths remains unknown to this day.

*The Spartan king Agis II ordered the massacre of all men from Hysaiae in ancient Argos. View from the Heraion of Argos into the Inachos plain, Argolis, Greece (Sarah Murray / **CC BY SA 2.0**)*

6. The Alleged Massacre of the Jews at Banu Qurayza

People have been blaming religion for their brutal misdeeds for millennia. When the **Prophet Muhammad** ordered his attack on Banu Qurayza, he claimed he did so at the insistence of Archangel Gabriel.

Supposedly, the angel had told the prophet that the Jewish tribe that lay within the fortress must be wiped out. This was awkward for Muhammad, as he had agreed to a peace treaty with the Jewish occupants.

Historically, it seems that the Jewish residents had broken their treaty with the Muslims after being pressured to do so by other local Jewish tribes. Muhammad's followers responded by going in and attacking the fortress. The siege lasted roughly three weeks.

After three weeks, the Muslims were victorious and their leader, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, ordered that the surrendering Jews should be taken into custody. They needed to be punished for opposing God's will.

It was ordered that all the men be killed, and the Jews property be divided between the victors. The women and children were taken as 'captives'. Captives was a nice way of saying slaves.

The male captives were rounded up and stripped. If they were found to possess pubic hair they were separated from their brothers and beheaded. The exact number of men killed at Banu Qurayza is unclear. It is most commonly cited that between 600 and 900 men were killed.

Some Islamic scholars have disputed this number, and whether the massacre ever occurred at all, citing it as Jewish propaganda. Jews and western scholars on the other hand have pointed to parts of the Quran and contemporary sources that appear to indicate the massacre happened.

*Detail from miniature painting 'The Prophet, Ali, and the Companions at the Massacre of the Prisoners of the Jewish Tribe of Beni Qurayzah', illustration of a 19th century text by Muhammad Rafi Bazil. (**Public Domain**)*

7. The Mass Slaughter of the Third Jewish-Roman War

It is no secret that the Jews and Romans didn't exactly get along. What is often forgotten today is just how bad things were. The **Third Jewish-Roman War** centered on a Jewish revolt in Judea between 132- 136 AD. The Jews were led by Simon Bar-Kokhba, who had proclaimed himself the Prince of Judea and whose followers believed him to be a messiah.

Simon used this belief to empower his followers. At the start, it worked, and the Jews fought well during the beginning of the war. The Romans faced more military defeats than they were used to. The Jews had their gloves off and were readily massacring any Roman troops they managed to capture.

When **Emperor Hadrian** heard how badly his men were doing, he dispatched strong reinforcements to the region. Their arrival in 134 AD was a turning point for the war. What followed was a massacre, as Jewish troops and civilians alike were crushed by the Roman troops. Entire towns and cities were wiped off the face of the planet.

It is estimated that at the beginning of the war, the Romans faced casualties of roughly 100,000 men, but some sources put the number at almost twice that. The Jews ultimately fared much worse. It is estimated that around 580,000 Jews were killed during the war. At least 400,000 of these deaths were during battle or from execution as prisoners of war. The remaining 180,000 were innocent civilians.

This isn't a clear-cut case of Jews=good, Romans=bad, however. Many of the civilians who were killed died at the hands of Bar-Kokhba's followers. Jews who refused to take part in the revolt were tortured and executed by their people. Greek and Roman civilians were also persecuted and massacred by Bar-Kokhba's followers during the war.

*Ruined walls of the Beitar fortress, the last stand of Bar Kokhba Revolt and massacre of Jews by Romans and other Jewish people alike (Bukvoed / **CC BY 4.0**)*

Conclusion

The brutality with which these massacres were carried out is awful and the lack of humanity terrifying. Whether it be for religious, political, or other reasons, humans have always been adept at finding excuses to massacre each other.

Most shocking, however, is the fact we haven't changed. If anything, people have just gotten better at it. It used to take time and effort to massacre a few thousand people. Now, all it takes is a few bombs or a handful of carefully placed air strikes. We can condemn the ancients for carrying out such atrocities, but the sad truth is many of us turn a blind eye to similar atrocities every day.

*Top Image: Massacres have been a near constant in human history. Pieter Bruegel the Elder painting The Triumph of Death, circa 1562. Source: **Public Domain***

By Robbie Mitchell

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Nobody gets paid to tell the truth.

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